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The spell of London

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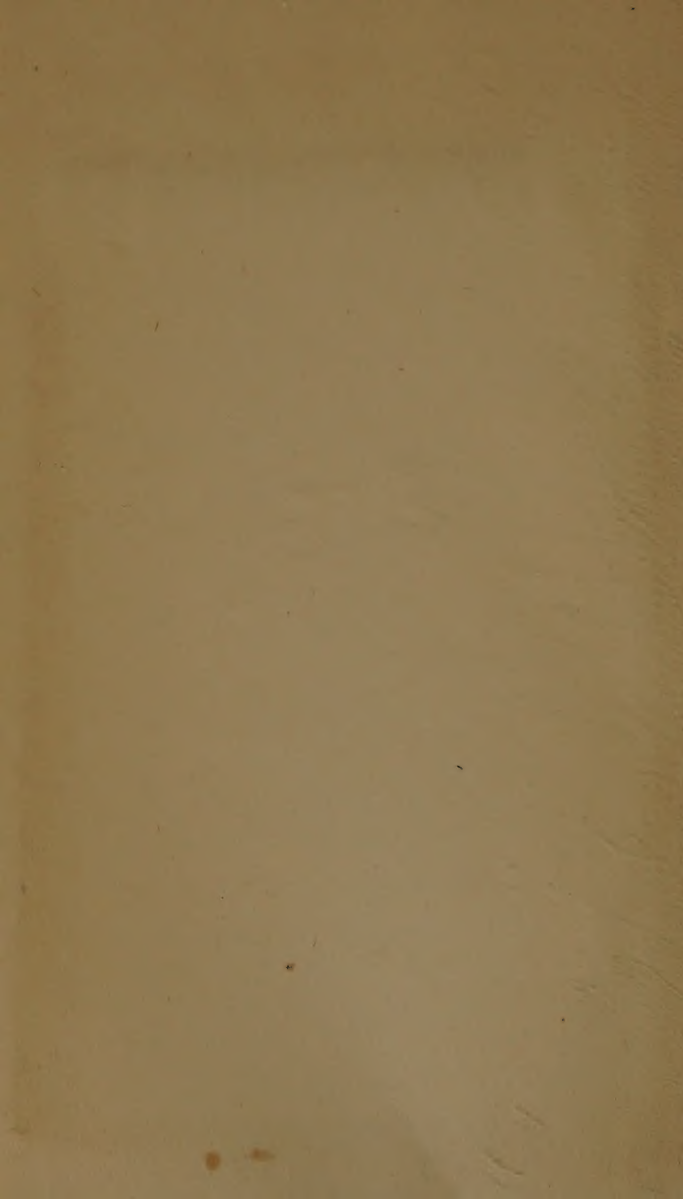
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THE SPELL OF LONDON

*O gray, O gloomy skies ! What then ?
Here is a marvellous world of men ;
More wonderful than Rome was, when
 The world was Rome !
See the great stream of life flow by !
Here thronging myriads laugh and sigh,
Here rise and fall, here live and die :
 In this vast home.*

—LIONEL JOHNSON

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THE SPELL OF LONDON

BY

H. V. MORTON

AUTHOR OF "THE HEART OF LONDON," ETC.

SIXTH EDITION

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To
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NOTE

HERE are more London sketches, the result of a demand for a companion volume to "The Heart of London." They appear much as they were printed from day to day in the "Daily Express."

H. V. M.

LONDON

February 1926

To have studied London to the full is to know that London tells her own story, and that no one can tell it for her. Whatever credit may come to those who act as scribe, it is after all a small thing, for the inspiration is drawn from the great city itself.

—SIR LAURENCE GOMME

THE SPELL OF LONDON

CAN you analyse a spell? How it is possible to capture in words a thing elusive as a dream that flies between sleeping and waking?

I suppose that every man and woman in this world who has suffered the wonder of being loved has at some time asked:

"But *why* do you love me?"

The unsatisfying, conclusive answer never varies.

"Because you are You!"



I was walking along the Embankment one night, a fretful autumn night with a movement of clouds across a small pale moon, and I stopped before Cleopatra's Needle, wondering how I would reply if a sphinx in that magic place whispered:

"Why do you love London?"

Would I consider a moment, as if on the edge of great eloquence, and reply, as usual:

"Because London is London!"

No doubt I would. But it might not go down

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very well with a sphinx who had troubled to whisper. She might say :

" I am rather tired of riddles and, as I am half a woman, I would like to hear someone make love to me on this vile night with rain coming and such a cold little moon in the sky. Couldn't you try to be less vague ; couldn't you begin like this : ' Sphinx of London, I love you because . . . ' Then you might go on and say something warming. . . . "

Woman !



" Sphinx of London, I love you because you have a distinct way with you, a spell, a beauty, and such amazing character. You do not give smiles to anyone who can foot a bill, as Paris does ; you require, Sphinx, some considerable understanding, so much, in fact, that people often begin to love you by first hating you. There is nothing cheap and tawdry in your soul ; and in that soul is knowledge of everything that can happen to a human being—all the tears of sorrow and all the smiles of joy."

" Please go on. . . . Beauty ? "

" Yes ; you have astounding beauty. I think Whistler told you that once. In the quick mists that enchant you is the sure beauty that brings tears to the eyes : characteristic beauty, Sphinx, which is a thousand miles from prettiness ; and it often happens that suddenly you shine out in glory, so it seems that a man is seeing you clearly

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for the first time and is rooted to the earth in cold sorrow because he can never hope to paint you. . . .

“ And to go away from you, London, is often to come nearer to you in loneliness, in strange places, when a memory of how it feels to ride down the Strand in rain on top of a 'bus is like remembering something lovely about your mother. It is then that you seem to see the gulls on the Thames, all fluttering white at Blackfriars ; then that you seem to feel the streets full of a life you understand—that is part of you—it is then that you seem to see the great black dome riding high on Ludgate Hill ; and London appears before you more than a home : a spiritual anchorage perhaps, in which you think you would stand a chance of happiness. You sit about in strange cities thinking : ‘ At this very minute Piccadilly is an avenue of amber lights on tip-toe with the thrill of theatres, taxi doors are snapping on a vision of silk ankles, two men in silk hats are standing in a crowd on an island, all the wide club windows are yellow, the Green Park trees are spectral white in lamplight, and the omnibuses stand like a herd of patient red bulls behind one white gloved hand.’ Ah ! London, dear London. . . . ”

“ Don't stop ! ”

“ And you can be damnably cruel, so flint hard that when the sound of you comes through a window in the dawn a sleeper, awakening, shudders and hides his head, fearing you. Yet you may smile on him and he will almost forget that you were ever cruel. . . . I said almost, Sphinx, I hope you heard that ! ”

The Spell of London

"And?"

"And then . . . well; I love you because—
you are You."

*

*

*

*

The little pale moon looked out of a flurry of
cloud and I walked on. The Sphinx registered no
emotion.

"The Keys" o o o o o

IT was a quarter to ten on a fine evening. A taxicab cruising along Piccadilly pulled to the kerb beside me.

"The Tower of London," I said.

I suppose that he had often been ordered to strange places at strange hours, but this seemed to surprise him, and it is a great achievement to surprise a London taxicab driver! He looked interested.

"Right up to the gate, sir?" he asked doubtfully.

"Right up to the gate," I replied.

We sped down crowded, glowing Piccadilly, into Trafalgar Square, along the dark Embankment, and into the deserted City of London. We rattled over Tower Hill and drew up with, on our left, the grey, shrouded fortress piled behind its moat, faintly white, grim, ghostly. In the shadows of the barrier gate a figure moved; lamplight shone a second on a bayonet and picked out a sentry's scarlet tunic.

"I have permission to see 'the Keys,'" I said.

A warder stepped out. "Follow me"; and I went on to the most ghostly scene in London—the Tower, at night.



Imagine those great gates leaning against the

The Spell of London

stars, with here and there a little casement window gold against the black; lamplight flinging the shadow of walls over the stones—sharp black and faint grey—and through the wide arch of the Byward Tower a luminous vista of turrets and battlements lying silent like a dream of Camelot.

The centuries fall away every night when darkness comes to the Tower of London. If any spot on earth is haunted here it is. From those eerie gateways, those unexpected postern gates, from those shadowy, machiolated walks what might not come in the silence of the night . . . what white woman wringing her hands; what sad favourite of kings. . . .

The head warder, wearing a long scarlet cloak, and a black-ribboned Tudor bonnet, came from the Byward Tower carrying a bunch of keys and an old lantern in which burned a tallow candle. He stood waiting, a splendid touch of colour in the dark frame of a gate spiked across by the bars of the old portcullis. He looked at his watch. It was not quite ten o'clock.



Every night for centuries the head warder of the Tower has waited like this to parade the King's Keys, with curious ceremony, to lock the vast oak gates, and turn the Tower again into a moated mediaeval stronghold barred against the perils of the night. Few people have seen this ceremony, and when it began and by whom no one knows.

“The Keys”

The ritual is lost in history. It may be as old as the Tower of London.

The head warder strode off towards the Wakefield Tower, his boots ringing on the stones, the lantern bobbing at his side making a yellow moon on his scarlet cloak. Through the gate of the Bloody Tower is the guardroom. Outside this he paused and cried in a loud voice :

“Escort for the Keys !”

There was a clatter of military boots and a thud of rifle butts as a sergeant and four men fell in. With the Keys and the swaying lantern in the middle they moved off.

As the sentries saw the approach of the little procession with its dancing lantern they shouldered their rifles and — ferlick-crack ! — they saluted. So the King’s Keys passed on into the outer ward.



Each sentry on the march to the barrier gate saluted as the Keys went by.

At the wicket gate the escort halted. The warder closed the gates, the escort turned about and . . . once more the ringing of feet on the stones and the glitter of the lantern. I stood by Traitors’ Gate—jet-black bars and water steps in a pool of lamplight—and watched them come back towards the Bloody Tower the way they had gone ; only this time they paused at the Middle Tower, and the two huge walls of oak were slowly moved and the great gate locked. The same at the Byward Tower. Now they approached the Bloody

The Spell of London

Tower, returning to the guardroom. In the darkness of the great arch the sentry stamped on the ground with his foot and cried :

“ Halt ! Who comes there ? ”

The head warder with the Keys and the escort stood still.

“ The Keys ! ” the warder answered.

“ Whose keys ? ” demanded the sentry.

“ King George’s Keys ! ”

“ Advance, King George’s Keys—all’s well ! ”

Tramp, tramp went the men with the King’s Keys up the slope through the pitch black gate of the Bloody Tower to the guardroom. Here on the terrace was drawn up the guard in charge of an officer with a drawn sword. The lamps shone over the uniforms, glittered on scarlet tunics, buttons, naked steel, and high bearskins.

The men with the King’s Keys stood at the foot of the steps facing the guard. The officer cried :

“ Guard and escort, present arms ! ”

Up went his sword hilt to his mouth, and down it flashed in salute as the rifles went flick—flock—crack in a cloud of pipeclay. So they stood a second. The head warder then took two paces forward, removed his Tudor bonnet, and cried :

“ God preserve King George ! ”

The guard, from the officer to the drummer boy, answered :

“ Amen ! ”

The guard dismissed ; the warder mounted a flight of dim steps with the Keys, which he took to the house of the Governor of the Tower for safe custody through the night. A bell-like clock

“The Keys”

among the grey turrets . . . a sentry paced in the darkness of the gate . . . clear on the air sounded a bugle playing “The Last Post.”

The Tower of London was locked up !

No man could now move without the countersign. Each gate meant detention if you did not know it. From the outside world of London no man could enter unless he knew that secret password, changed each night and sent to the King each day.

As it was a thousand years ago, so it is every night when the King's Keys go by. . . .

Out into the empty gauntness of Tower Hill I went, feeling that I had fallen for a little while into some ancient dream.

Inside "Big Ben" o o o o

"NO; there's no lift!" said an official of the Palace of Westminster (which is the correct title for the Houses of Parliament when the House is up), "and there are three hundred and seventy-four steps up to Big Ben, which get my rheumatism something cruel when I have to go up three or four times a day."

We stood in Palace Yard and gazed upwards at the clock as critical mountaineers regard an alp before they climb it. It seemed, in my imagination, to grow higher and higher as I looked, like something in "Alice in Wonderland." The official then unlocked a little door in the base of the clock tower, and we ascended a narrow spiral staircase. We had, perhaps, mounted two hundred steps when, without any warning, the narrow stone tube in which we were entombed became filled with a sound so violent, so furious, and so powerful that it was terrifying—as though some horrible monster imprisoned in the tower had roared out in anger. The sound beat against my ear drums and seemed to go right through my body like X-rays. It rumbled and pounded at the stones till it seemed that they must disintegrate into dust and fall like the walls of Jericho.

It was frightening. I stood still. Theseus, I think, felt just like this when he heard the Minotaur bellowing in the darkness of the Labyrinth.

Inside " Big Ben "

" Half-past four ! " said my guide, calmly.

It was only the clock above politely telling London that it was time for tea.

We mounted onward and upward.



He unlocked a door, and I walked into the works of Big Ben ! (It is wrong to call the clock Big Ben, for that is the name of the great bell which chimes the hours ; but never mind !) Was there ever such a clock ? In the middle of a room, round which you could drive a two-seater car, stood a mass of wheels on an iron frame. They reminded me of a flat-bed printing machine. From this machine radiated four long steel tubes bearing the clock hands to the four round dials of Big Ben. One of the dials was visible to me : a huge round glass window bigger than the rose window of a cathedral. I could see the shadow of the fourteen-foot minute hand lying across it like a spear. I went up and measured the space between the minutes. There was a foot between each minute marked on the face of the clock ! The Roman numerals were two feet in height !

" Two men stripped to the waist used to wind this clock," said my guide, " but now we do it with an electric motor."

He was standing looking at the works affectionately, so I joined him. The big machine appeared to be asleep except for one little wheel that went tick-tack every other second.

" Come and look at the pendulum ! "

The Spell of London

Big Ben is the grandfather of all clocks. He works on a thirteen feet long pendulum with a bob on the end which weighs four hundredweight.

"What is that halfpenny doing on the pendulum?"

"That adjusts it. Although it is so big, the slightest weight affects it, and I suppose the man who last regulated the clock discovered that it needed a halfpenny to keep it dead right!"

Suddenly the high room was filled with light: and I knew that the four faces of Big Ben were now like four yellow moons above the dusk of a London evening.



We mounted a maze of openwork staircases above the works of the clock, and there I saw Big Ben, the great bell, hanging with four Little Bens round him. Big Ben speaks only once an hour, but the four chimes sing the quarters and the half-hours. Big Ben is a monster. He would, if inverted, make a good public swimming bath. At his side reposes in a threatening attitude a vast hammer that weighs four hundredweights and looks like a battering ram.

And while I waited to hear him strike five I went up and out to the balcony round that nautical-looking lantern which is always lit at night while the Speaker is in the chair, so that absent M.P.'s may know where their duty lies. . . .

Below lay London lovelier, I think, than I have ever seen her, with an evening mist, blue and

Inside "Big Ben"

patchy, trailing in slow wreaths over her, settling down over her like a fallen cloud so that Nelson at Charing Cross stood up jet black like a cairn above the mist on a mountain top. And the streets were strings of lit lamps: long avenues of amber mellowness in which there was movement, from which ascended a dull, uniform roar of wheels. The towers of Westminster Abbey stood with their feet in a thin blue haze.

"Come quickly!" shouted my guide from the platform near the bells.

I ran down and stood leaning over an iron fence, watching the great nest of five bells, as the passenger in a ship leans over the deck rail.

No warning: and then—

Startling, hair-raising sound broke suddenly from the four Little Bens and ran round them again. Before every hour they say:

All through this hour, Lord, be my guide,
And, by Thy Power, no foot shall slide.

Then they stop to let Big Ben do his gigantic bit. . . .

It seemed that Big Ben gathered himself together to tell London that it was five o'clock. In a flash the great battering ram drew itself apart from the bell, and—

Bang!

It seemed to me that a howitzer had fired a shell. . . .

Bang!

It seemed to me that Big Ben was striking in my head. . . .

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Bang !

It seemed to me that the tower of the Houses of Parliament could not remain erect another minute. . . .

Bang !

It seemed to me that the whole of London must surely be alarmed at this !

Bang !

It seemed to me very beautiful that it was not twelve o'clock !

* * * *

The hammer came to rest against the hard cheek of Big Ben, but the sound went on and on and on up there in the clock tower. It was shattering, unforgettable ! I looked down into London, but no one seemed surprised. . . .

On the way earthwards in the spiral tube I sank into an angry rumble of sound, the echoes of the great noise made when Big Ben keeps one of his many appointments with Eternity.

Among the Kings



ONE night not long ago I stood under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris beside the grave of the French Unknown Soldier.

A keen wind from the Champs Élysées whistled through the great arch, driving the flames of the graveside braziers low over the ground like streamers of wind-blown hair. There were pale flowers and shadows. A Cæsarian tomb, grand and unforgettable in the centre of a beautiful city, the sound and surge of life ever near, but, it seemed to me, in spite of all, so lonely, so cold, so far from a church, like a solitary grave on a hill-top.

Westminster Abbey. . . . I stood there recently beside our Unknown Warrior, who lies not only at the heart of London, but also at the heart of England, here in magic earth, in this sacred soil, so warm in love, so safe in honour. No noise of traffic disturbs his sleep, no unkind wind whistles over him—no solitude of night. Instead, the silence of a mighty church, a silence as deep and lovely as though he were lying in some green country graveyard steeped in peace, above him a twilight in which the stored centuries seem to whisper happily of good things done for England.



There were few sightseers. It was not the

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season. Two elderly women sat against the pillars in the south aisle making water-colour sketches of the sweep of the arches above the choir.

In the centre of the nave, free from the barriers that once hedged it, lay the grave of the Unknown Warrior—a large black marble slab, on which a long inscription is inlaid in letters of brass. From a pillar in the north aisle near the grave hung a worn-looking Union Jack. How English! Most other nations would have explained somewhere for all to see that this is no ordinary flag, that it gained those creases, which a woman's careful ironing and pressing have been unable to efface, when it covered a rude Communion table in France with the 141st Brigade of the 47th (London) Division. When they brought the Unknown Warrior through the streets, with the sombre guns booming and the troops slow marching to a wail of brass, this was the flag that covered the coffin; and there it hangs unheralded in the Abbey. In its creases you may see—ah! how many Last Suppers in Flanders fields. . . .



An official guide, wearing an armlet, came up with two Americans, husband and wife. They read aloud the inscription:

"Beneath this stone rests the body of a British warrior, unknown by name or rank, brought from France to lie among the most illustrious of the land. . . ." And so on to the splendid end: "They buried him among the kings because he

Among the Kings

had done good toward God and toward His House. . . .”

“That’s beautiful,” they said quietly. “That’s the most beautiful thing in London.”

“Those brass letters,” explained the guide, “are made from cartridge cases melted down . . . cases picked up in the British lines in France after the war.”

They went over to the Union Jack, and beneath it they looked at a small frame, in which is the blue-ribboned Congressional Medal of Valour, the gift of the people of the United States, the highest order in their power to bestow.



They went away, lingering here and there under the vast arch of the nave. I stood there thinking. There were flowers—a few tulips, freshly pulled, and daffodils, the first of the year. . . .

This tomb and the Cenotaph bear witness to the greatest emotion this nation has ever felt. Children are brought here every year; and so the memory, without the sharpness, perhaps, felt by us who lived through it, goes on with another generation. In this way a nation keeps alive its holy places. Wonderful to think of this unknown boy, or man, lying here with our kings, our captains, our prophets, and our priests. It is the first time in the history of the world that this has happened. His fame is greater, too; he is Everyman who died in the War. No matter how many mothers believe that he is theirs, they are right: they are all of

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them right—for he is every mother's son who did not come home from France.

Always, as long as England stands in history, this marble stone will tell the story of the only unknown man to whom the great Abbey of Westminster opened its arms, saying: "Come in, you Unknown Warrior, among the kings and the great ones of all time, for you too are great, you too spent your life nobly, and you too are for ever holy in the memory of this people."



As I went out, a thin rustle of organ music came whispering down the nave, and far off, like a voice in a cloud, sounded the echo of a prayer.

Little Tigers



IN the darkness of the night the City of London, deserted and so marvellously silent, is like a prehistoric forest of stone.

Vast cliffs, which are buildings, go up in the darkness, tall, incalculable, and between lie cañons of blackness in which no footfall sounds ; the small square mile within the walls is deserted. In thousands of offices sheets cover millions of typewriters. Desks, chairs, and all the machinery of livelihood stand as if sudden death had come upon their owners. Mr. Brown's old hat hangs on a peg, pathetic evidence of absent Mr. Brown. When the prince entered the palace of the Sleeping Beauty he met this same suspended animation. A sad-faced moon peeping from a fretful scurry of cloud pours a pale, momentary radiance on the floor where the envelopes of the last post lie disarrayed around the waste paper basket. Such silence ! Not even the ghost of a senior partner ; not even the ghost of someone asking for a rise in salary ! Just graveyard silence. Then happens that thing which would so agitate absent peach-coloured legs—the swift rush of a rat. . . .



This is the hour when those, to me, interesting little people come into their own—the City cats.

The Spell of London

In the darkness of alleys, in the unlit gloom of stairways, they sit waiting. Till the dawn they own London. Their eyes, like the eyes of witches, glitter in archways. Now and again the shrill announcement of a fierce love, or an equally fierce hate, tears the silence like a knife. Little maidenly tabby, big battling ginger, slinky black mother of many families, and great coal-black tiger, they all sit and wait, hunched up at street corners or gently padding round on their little velvet feet.

Do they sit and think of the morning when the cats' meat man will come mewling down the road pushing his small barrow? Do they dream of this celestial visitor, the lineal descendant of the priest in the Great Temple of Bubastis, who used to feed them four thousand years ago? (They remember him, of course!) Not a bit of it! A cat never sentimentalizes like a dog. What do they think of then? Just this. . . .

Ten thousand years drop from London when the last clerk goes home. The cats are back in the jungle. They have been enduring men and women all day with a fair show of affection. Little black mother may even have exhibited her variegated tell-tale family to an appreciative typist! It meant nothing. Day is unreal to a cat; only night exists.

Out of the night, down countless centuries, comes a call—the old jungle call—and the little tigers awaken, stretch their legs, shoot out the knives in the padded cushions of their paws, lick their lips, arch their backs, and set out on their adventures

Little Tigers

The great stone jungle of London swallows them as the forest used to swallow them ages ago.



All over London comfortable human dogs lie sleeping on blankets ; sometimes their legs twitch as they dream that they are following their masters on a splendid chase, or they start and awaken at a dream of food and fire, and the imagined feel of a hand—a loving hand—playing with their ears, patting their eager, delighted bodies. Dogs have travelled far away from the wolf, but the little secret cat and his big brother the tiger still walk through pre-history side by side.



Mating and death. That is what the jungle has always offered ; what London offers every night to the cat people.

Romeo may crouch in the darkness making a sound that suggests that a small dynamo is whirling away inside him, watching Juliet, who never takes her eyes from his, moving her head as he moves, retreating as he advances. Or else it is death he is after. With rocklike patience he waits by the hole on the stairs. He does not mind how long he waits. He is assisted in his vigil by the accumulated patience and enthusiasm for a kill inherited by every ordinary cat, the legacy of a day when the forests dipped green boughs in the water. . . .

The Spell of London

A sound? Every muscle is magnificently taut for the spring, the claws ready. His instinct tells him that his foe is there. He has only to wait and then. . . . Does he kill coldly, without emotion, or does he blaze with the red anger of a moment in which he is obliterated and something primitive and unaccountable inside him takes control—as human beings kill?

Now! Like a black spring he launches himself into the darkness, there is a scurry and a fight. He almost missed! He crouches in the dark over his victim, singing a song of triumph that is as old as the hills. He is a complete little savage. A hundred centuries separate him from himself as he is in the morning, such a perfect little black gentleman tripping along towards his milk, affectionate, almost smiling. He is Jekyll and Hyde. So he guards his kill, giving it a push and growling at it.



"Good morning, darling," says Mabel as she takes off her hat in the morning. "Was he glad to see his missus again, bless him?"

The murderer rubs his head against her knees and goes over to Gladys, who lisps prettily and likes him a lot. Gladys shrieks and holds her skirt tight round her.

"Oh, look—look at vat!" she lisps. "How can he be so nice and sweet—he's killed a wat!"

There on the floor lies Hyde's work. But Jekyll is purring fit to burst—little two-faced tiger.

The Passionate Triangle ♪ ♪ ♪

THEY were saying good night. . . .

I thought how marvellous are lovers' partings. A man will linger as if snatching an hour from death as he whispers with the tragic expression of an explorer starting off into the unknown: "I'll see you again to-morrow, dearest." The girl's eyes will go vague and she will say, "Oh, dear!" and sigh.

These two were trying to say good night, trying to summon up strength of mind to part, when, with the speed and the silence of Fate, a thin, strident woman came up behind and lashed a big black handbag across the man's face. The blow left a pallid, bloodless patch, in the centre of which a thin red line slowly grew large; the clasp had torn the skin.

"Now I've caught you!" cried the woman. "I'll teach you to go trapesing about with your fancy little. . . . This!" she declaimed to the growing crowd, "this dirty little rat is my husband!"

Smack!

A second time the handbag cut across his face, and the woman reeled in her forceful enthusiasm. The man was dazed. He looked round for the girl to whom but a minute ago he had represented Romance. She had fled! The third line in the triangle had wiped itself out! He lifted his arm

The Spell of London

to his bleeding face ; and then his eyes took fire and he hated.

I stood there mildly revolted and faintly thrilled. Heat is never so devilish as cold, or, I think, so cruel : I could not feel shocked. These two people seemed like grotesque marionettes to me unreal, improbable. I could have understood them fighting one another in private, but not with a chorus ! It was the very essence of all emotional drama seen at its lowest, the plot of most plays, the theme of most fiction, boiled down to the dregs and staged in a London by-street.

I became aware that several women had gathered round the wife and were giving her the moral support of sex sympathy against the unfaithful male. She worked herself up like a dervish. Her gasping denunciation became unintelligible. Raising her voice a tone, she poured out most unexpected abuse, and the surprising thing was that she was not a common woman : she was, as the police courts say, " well but quietly dressed," and at less heated moments it occurred to me that she probably made excellent jumpers and took in the parish magazine. A taxicab driver on the edge of the crowd blanched as he listened. I remembered that a famous surgeon once told me that the most awful things are said by the nicest women under anæsthetics.

A revolted navy stepped up.

" 'Ere, shut that, missus ! " he said. She turned

The Passionate Triangle

on him like a panther, and he went back into private life.

The husband stood there like a frightened terrier faced by a cat, rooted there by some mistaken sense of dignity, yet longing to be anywhere else.

"I'll show you!" gasped the woman. "Take that. . . ."

The husband parried the blow and lashed out. Two men stepped between. The woman then addressed the meeting, giving a delightfully vivid account of the other woman's appearance, morals, and ancestors. It was extremely nasty.

The husband, with a pale show of heroism, tried to defend the character of his lost love, but the handbag spoilt his best bits. . . . Things began to look ugly. She took out a hatpin. Somebody went for a policeman. . . .

An uncontrolled woman is terrible as the spirit of vengeance. I watched her and wondered how many calm women boil like this yet never spill over, never show it, never allow themselves the luxury of this. How many gentle women have this tiger hidden in them?

The man, seeking advantage of a lull in operations, slunk off, his hands in his pockets, trying to look casual; she gave a shriek and started after him, and then it was that I saw the thing that tumbled me into heartache.

"Oh, mother, mother, don't, don't!" sobbed a pretty little girl of twelve, her poor, pinched face white with terror, her poor little thin hands convulsively catching at the woman's skirts. It made me sick. That child! That poor, frightened

The Spell of London

little thing dragged into this mud ! What fools grown people can be ; what thoughtless fools !

The tide of battle ebbed away, the man making a running fight, the woman pressing after him, harrying him, and behind went the little girl with a face like a flower hidden in her hands.

“ Mother, mother, don’t—oh, don’t ! ”

I shall not forget that ; and neither will the child. Quite probably those two will make it up, for life is full of fire and water, but the child will lie awake at night trembling, remembering, hiding her face in the pillow, and crying, feeling herself in the lonely misery of youth locked away from her fellows because of this ugliness, unable to size it up, her small heart drenched in horror at this glimpse of a raw world from which the fairies have gone never to return.

To cause that suffering is, to my mind, sin.

Good Form

THIS is so true of London that I must begin by saying that I am not writing about any individual, but of a type. . . .

He comes out into Pall Mall from the direction of St. James' at about 9.30 p.m. He is smoking a cigar. His silk hat, his evening tie, his cane are each perfect. His shoes are from Jermyn Street. Observing that grey head, that clipped white moustache, that fine skull, those blue eyes in their nest of lines, bleak and cold, the Bolshevik would shriek "Aristocrat!" and "Capitalist!" and envy that face and that bank account. But, as a matter of fact, this old man has only four hundred a year and a certain sense of form which has never been on sale. That is all.

He walks slowly along Pall Mall savouring the air in a quiet way, casting a frozen eye over to the young Guardsman at the gate of Marlborough House. He comes to his club, enters up the broad steps, and there he will remain hidden behind a newspaper till it is bedtime. Then he will take out a thin gold watch, which his father gave him half a century ago, compare it with the clock on the mantelpiece, snap his watch lid with an air of finality, and go home.

He lives in a suite of Georgian rooms in a house

The Spell of London

let out to bachelors, old and young. There is a valet on the premises. When he has paid his rent he has just enough over to keep his tailor respectful, and to procure the whisky and cigars to which he has always been accustomed. No one ever comes to visit him. No woman ruffles his smooth life. He lives alone with the antlers of the stags he shot in '75; and over the mantelpiece hangs an old pattern cavalry sword.

His books deal mostly with dead elephants and old wars. His pictures show him, young and fresh, sitting among the subalterns in martial groups taken outside officers' messes, or, older, standing with one foot on a dead pig somewhere in India, perhaps holding up the limp paw of a tiger or sitting an alert polo pony on some vast and dusty ground. That was his life.

Who, you wonder, was the lady of the Lillie Langtry era in the silver frame and the Court plumes? Who knows? She gazes out at the old man all day long with a sweet and constant expression which may, of course, be misleading. His mother, perhaps, or a favourite sister, or possibly the girl who took the right turning and married someone with a real income. You never can tell, and lonely old men do not talk, except to themselves, about the women who look at them from silver frames.

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Every evening this old man goes into his little bedroom, where he shaves and dresses, as though he were going to a dinner-party. He ties his tie

Good Form

as carefully as though he were dining with a woman. (Perhaps he is.) And he sits there all alone, with the sword and the antlers, eating the neat and unspectacular meal which they bring up to him from the service kitchen. Sometimes he has a glass of claret. It is good claret. He has little of anything, but you may depend upon it that everything he has is good. His guns cost a hundred and fifty guineas fifty years ago, and they are as good as ever.

Once a year he receives a letter with a Scottish postmark inviting him to join a shooting party on a friend's estate. This is the great event of his life. The whisky bottle is not replenished and he stops his cigars.

Those beautiful guns are uncased, and he devotes days to them. He sees that every inch of them is right, and he cocks them frequently through the window at unsuspecting passers-by, or whispers "Mark over!" and lifts them towards his Adam ceiling with a promising swiftness. His eyes looked bluer and bleaker. The valet comes in sometimes and finds him just sitting and smiling in his arm-chair by the fire. He is very happy.

The guard at King's Cross spots him for "a real toff," and there is much unnecessary fussing round him as he and his gun-cases are shown into the sleeping car.

Then Scotland . . . and the heather; misty days, and a big, easy country house; talk and reminiscence and shooting.

He tips the gillie two pounds, and returns to St. James' to drink water for a while.

Trial by Jury o o o o o

COUNSEL lean back in their seats ; the juniors arrange blue papers ; partisan argument is ended ; now comes impartial reasoning.

Through the oak-panelled court of the Old Bailey, stuffy it seems with the reek of discovered secrets, passes a rustle of attention. Pallid faces peer from the gallery, women in the body of the court snuggle into their furs and lean forward with slightly parted lips. All eyes are directed to the bench, where the smooth-faced judge sits in a padded chair with the Royal Arms above his head. His grave face is framed by a brindle wig, his sombre robes are lightened by a touch of scarlet, and as his arms move about his desk there is a softness of ermine. Here is the majesty of the law, so calm, so remote, so lifted in judgment above the arena of rhetoric. He seems to collect to himself in the supreme moment of a long trial all the power and might of British justice. He looks towards the jury-box. He is speaking in a slow, mellow voice, each word weighed in the scales of value, each sentence pedantically designed to form part of the almost perfect geometric pattern of his logic.

The virtue of a woman and the honour of a man ! He deals so dispassionately with passionate things. No case this about money or a dry legal argument : an invalid wife, death, gossip, the discovery of the

Trial by Jury

other woman, and a house of cards falling over a man's head. Murder or not? So he goes on, smooth, deliberate, sifting things, separating good from bad, like someone sorting flowers, putting the weeds to one side, the flowers to the other.

"And so, gentlemen of the jury, I would beg you to observe . . ." So on and so on.

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Gentlemen of the jury! Swiftly the spot-light of the drama shifts from counsel to jury-box, and in its blaze twelve good men and true sit up heavily, as if oppressed by words. One feels their anxiety to have done with this weariness and to hear the click of their garden gates again. What qualification have they, one wonders, to judge the passions and the frailties and to assess the nobilities that live side by side with them?

No wigs hide their shining heads, no gowns dignify their drab clothes. They sit there: twelve dullish, ordinary men. Suppose one were in the dock, caught up in the tangle of this web, how one would search their faces for a gleam of understanding; for a trace of hope! In such circumstances how sinister can an ordinary man become!

One wonders, as they lounge gloomily or place their heads on their hands, how much they know of life and temptation, what has been their greatest sin: an intrigue, a sharp business deal?

They sit there with a man's life and a woman's virtue in the hollows of their hands, and there is

The Spell of London

no sound in court but the level voice of his lordship and the turning of his crisp papers.

In the dock a worn man, caught up in the net like a half-dead fly ! What is he thinking about ? Is he trying to probe the minds of the twelve men who hold his fate ? Or is he, under the merciful pressure of agony, caught up in some silly memory far removed from all this : some memory of a summer's day long ago ; or does he rise out of himself and look down as in a theatre, unable to realize that this poor torn man in the dock is himself, seeing, in imagination, the small black cap, the cold words that mean death ?



The buzz of talk rises octave by octave. The jury have retired, the judge has left his seat and gone out through a little door in the oak panelling. Barristers lean back and whisper. Women, their eyes large and emotional, move their white-gloved hands in little inexpressive gestures of excitement. The verdict must be "Innocent." Must be ! How clearly the judge put it, how well he indicated the main line of reasoning ; how he, as it were, took the prosecution and tore open the argument for all to see. . . .

An usher comes in with lifted hand and cries "Hush !"



The judge and the jury have returned. The

Trial by Jury

prisoner is brought up into the dock again. How white his knuckles go as he grips the rails, facing the grim jury.

Very grave and unreadable. Quickly! Get it over! Finish it! Cut short the agony of waiting. Each second is elastic. The twelve faces tell nothing. The woman in the case, with the blood drawn from the pale oval of her face, looks up as though her burning eyes would bore into the brains of the jury, and read there that which she longs and fears to hear. The verdict, quick! Anything is better than this second's delay. . . .

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict?"

So cold, and yet with just a tinge of anxiety, the fine face slightly flushed.

"Not guilty, my lord!"

Through the court a great sigh and an arrested wave of clamour. The majesty of the law rises slowly, and goes out . . . a touch of red on black, and the softness of ermine.

The web has broken. The fly is free.

Love and Lavender

IT was soon to be midnight.

The Strand, yellow with light and cool after a hot day, was sinking gradually to rest, as it does when the bars and theatres have closed. A nibbled gold moon swung high over the chimney-pots. Suddenly it happened ! A voice high up above me said :

“ Keb, sir ? ”

It was a hansom ! I had seen it before in daylight some days previously. I remembered that a man sitting in front of me on the top of an omnibus had turned to look at it, and had made some remark about it to a friend. A hansom ! Once king of the London streets, once the gondola of the Strand, and now . . . there it stood beside the kerbstones with its queer air of being wrong way up, a sedan chair slung between two huge wheels, the horse glooming in the collar, the driver sitting perilously at the back, with his long whip in a metal slot near his right hand.

“ Keb, sir ? ”

I felt that it would be ridiculous to ride in a hansom. I was waiting for a taxicab. I thought that the last time I had ridden in a hansom was when I was a boy at school, and I remembered that it was a frosty night, and the horse sat down on a hill and kept on sitting down till we reached the level. How many Londoners

Love and Lavender

of the young generation have ever been in a hansom ?

“ Keb, sir ? ”

“ Piccadilly ! ” I said, stepping from a foot rest to a little platform and entering this strange vehicle. The horse, feeling the weight of a passenger, was appropriately astonished. His ears went up. I heard the driver go “ Tsk, tsk ! ” with his mouth, the reins tightened, and we moved off smoothly, I feeling that the whole affair might turn turtle or else—fade away and leave me standing in the Strand the victim of a vision of a ghost of that old, quiet, leisurely London that has gone for ever. . . .

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When I looked out of the window I could see the rubber tyres of the big wheels revolving. I had in front a beautiful view of the horse's tail. The little doors swung to and met. I was in a cosy little arm-chair on wheels. How different from a taxicab ! You can quarrel in a taxicab. You can turn your back and sulk and gloom, and even walk about and sit on the opposite seats. But a hansom ! Our fathers knew something when they proposed in a hansom !

“ Clip-clop, clippity-clop ” went the horse up the Strand ; and it seemed to me as we entered the big vacancy of Trafalgar Square that Nelson was quite delighted with us. I leant out, resting my arms on the little doors, smoking a cigarette in the cool night, watching the whip-lash wave in the

The Spell of London

air, not unkindly, but almost caressingly, almost encouragingly, over the horse's flanks.

Cockspur Street . . . the Haymarket. . . .

Then it was that I became aware of a faint scent in the hansom, a sweet lavender-like scent.



A little lid opened in the roof above me, and, looking up, I saw the driver's moustache outlined against the heavens :

" Just the Circus, sir ? "

" Yes."

The little lid closed with a snap.

Was it lavender ? An odd, ghostly smell ! There are times when inanimate things seem trying to tell you something, when rooms and chairs, it would seem, have a story they desperately desire you to understand. It may have been the hour, it may have been a lobster supper, it may have been just moonlight over London and the clip-pity-clop of those antiquated hooves up the Haymarket, but I think this relic, this last of the London gondolas, tried to tell me a story of love, lavender, and London ; of a little white face behind a black-spotted veil, a little ermine cap and a little ermine cape, and a girl whose ankles had never been seen by man, who had legs only unofficially. And He, the hero, wore side whiskers and plaid trousers that strapped under his Wellingtons, and looked so, so " noble " as he sucked the top of his ebony cane.

Love and Lavender

"You are assured of my deepest affections, Angeline. . . ."

A flutter, a white hand raised protestingly.

"Fie, fie, you should not speak to me so, a helpless girl, at your mercy. It is not . . . not right."

"Then, Angeline, may I declare my intentions to your father?"

A sigh. Eye-work. Another sigh.

"Yes—er—Montague!"

"Angeline, I crave your forgiveness for this sudden, wild . . . your beauty carried me away, your pale nymph-like profile, your . . ."

"Hush, sir, you make me blush. . . ."

How much more I might have heard goodness alone knows, but at this point the lid opened and the moustache above came to view bristling slightly with indignation.

"We've been 'ere for some time, sir!" said the voice.

"Oh, sorry. I didn't know. How much? . . . Good night!"

"Good night to *you*, sir."

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I turned in empty Piccadilly and listened to the ghostly clippity-clop go on into the distance, and cease.

Our Bridge of Sighs ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

WAPPING STAIRS. A clock struck twelve ; and a high, cold moon shone over the river.

I stood muffled to the eyes in an ulster as I waited for the patrol boat of the river police which was to take me out on a night's hunting. There was no sound but the tide ebbing from the Thames mud with lapping, sucking noises. Downstream a melancholy siren gave a banshee wail and was silent ; round me were shadows and lamplight pale over dreary alleyways ; sinister steps led down to the exposed ooze that gleamed like polished silver in the light of the moon. What an eerie spot. I remembered every shilling shocker that I have read. I saw, in imagination, " the gang " creep from shadow to shadow, I heard the splash of a falling body, the swift sound of pursuit, and then, cutting the darkness, the call of a whistle and . . .

There it was ! A whistle. Out of the night it came ! This was not imagination. A dark shape detached itself from the dancing quicksilver of the river, and I heard the soft throbbing of the patrol boat and saw her green bow lights as she swept in towards land in the pale V of her wash, nosing the water eagerly like an otter.

" Good evening, sir ! " I returned the salute of a dark form in a peaked cap which rose up out of the stern. I stepped in. " Right away ! " The

Our Bridge of Sighs

engine purred, the boat swung round, and away we went into the dark mystery of the downstream reaches.

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"Yes, crews of three men patrol the river all night long. . . . That's Limehouse to your left."

I saw a jagged silhouette, black against the pale blue-grey of the sky. Behind us the moon made a fish-scale pattern on the water, each wave crested with light—oily, dancing. We steered close to land. The grim wharves towered above us. Two powerful police lanterns played like little search-lights over them; pallid disks moving over the shut windows, picking out the detail, wavering over huddled, shrouded barges.

"All correct!"

Off we throbbed downstream, past a line of unemployed barges—"starvation buoys," the sergeant called them—moored in a line, their masts stark against the sky. We steered round the crew of a German steamer who were wearily rowing back after a night ashore.

"What's that? Ease her up!"

Out went our lights and noiselessly we approached a deserted wharf.

Just like a swimming rat we came up in the shadow, the lanterns ready.

"Now!" A steady flood of light poured over the wharf, explored the darkness of its piles. In the dazzle a huge rat, startled, leapt into the water and away. Nothing else! The keen eyes of the

The Spell of London

patrol sergeant had been deceived by, perhaps, a fluttering sack, a pile of timber that for a second looked like a man.

"You get so that you can smell out a river thief," said the sergeant, laughing at his mistake. "You get to know every boat on the river. A row boat near a barge at night is always suspicious. Do they ever fight? Lord, yes! Do you remember, Jack, that night Sergeant Blank jumped in after a thief near Deptford, and how they had a real old slogging match with the mud up to their waists!"

"Yes, and do you remember that night old Bill boarded a barge that didn't look quite right, and saw four pairs o' legs down a hatchway, and banged it down quick and sat on it and bagged the whole bunch of them? Of course, sir, you go nights with nothing happening except perhaps a body. . . .

"A body?"

"Yes; they often get caught up below water for weeks, and then . . ."

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We were off Greenwich. We seemed the only living things on the river. From right to left bank we cruised, nosing, probing, flashing. Our lights had wavered over thousands of pounds' worth of goods lying out there in the dark of the river unwatched. Imagine miles of carts stacked with merchandise left alone all night in the streets. That is the Thames at night: an invitation to the

Our Bridge of Sighs

thief. I hope the insurance companies send the river police Christmas cigars!

Three men in a boat, with the safety of the Thames in their eyes and in their rudder arm. It is difficult to feel romance when the wind cuts through a blanket cloak and an oilskin, but I felt it; the romance of these little questing crews, out in all weathers, and night after night from dusk to dawn safeguarding the highway of London Town, the terror of thief and all moonlighting folk.

We turned back on our watery beat. How dead and cold and mysterious it was! It was after 1 a.m. We passed a lone man in a rowing boat, sweating in the bitter cold as his cracking muscles pulled a gigantic raft of unhewn logs to some riverside timber yard. A red lantern stood on the acre of wet wood: and he passed on in the silence and the solitude, a very symbol of labour. We flashed our lights over barge after barge stacked with ingots of lead. Suddenly a shadow rose up out of them, and we challenged. A thin wisp of a man without an overcoat, smoking a cigarette. He was the watchman. "Good night!" Off we went.

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"We're the oldest police force in the country," said the sergeant, as he put over the tiller and let me examine the vast bulk of the drums of Tower Bridge. "We were formed by the East India Company in 1797, and merged with the Metropolitan Police in 1839. . . . Now we're under Blackfriars Bridge. . . ."

The Spell of London

The Embankment swept round, its lights like a string of pearls round the dark neck of sleeping London. . . .

As the police boat made for Waterloo Pier Station I had a marvellous view of Cleopatra's Needle framed in a dark arch. The great Embankment hotels exposed lifeless frontages to the moon, an all-night tramcar came up from Blackfriars, and as I stepped ashore at Suicide Station I saw the pale face of a poor "sleeper-out" gazing down at us from the stone balustrade. It was nearly 3 a.m.

But the stations of the Thames Police never sleep. Inside was a yellow warmth and a stove. A sergeant was answering the telephone; some detail of night life on the Thames. "Yes, sir. . . . Very good, sir. . . ." Far down the river it seemed an inspector was issuing instructions that affected Waterloo Bridge. I looked out of the window, over the dark river streaked by moonlight, at the great bridge flung out over the darkness, and westward, where the gold face of Big Ben shone as his cold, solemn notes chimed the hour. Moored to the pier, the patrol boat rode the tide, her green and red lights bobbing.

"So this is Suicide Station," I said.

The sergeant replaced the telephone receiver.

"Well, I wouldn't exactly call it that," he said with the caution that marks all good sergeants.

Nevertheless it is so. It is one of the most remarkable institutions on the river. More poor, miserable souls have jumped to death from Waterloo Bridge than from any other bridge on

Our Bridge of Sighs

the Thames. Nine out of ten jump on the downstream side, probably with the vague idea in their tortured brains that their weary bodies stand a better chance of being carried out to sea.

How many Londoners know that day and night a police boat waits in the shadow of the bridge? It is tied to its moorings by a loose knot. One pull and it is free. It is a curious boat. At the stern is a roller.

"Have you ever tried to pull anyone out of water into a small boat?" asked a policeman. "If so, you'll understand why that roller is there. Before it was fitted the rescue of a drowning person was like a kind of star turn at a regatta; now you just manœuvre the man or woman to the stern, grab hold of his arms, and draw him in over the roller as easy as—well, falling off the bridge. . . ."

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I stepped out of the little floating police station and walked along the pier. The sergeant threw open a door, and we entered one of the strangest rooms in London. It is fitted up for the reception of suicides. In the middle of the room is a bath. The sergeant turned on the tap and a hissing stream of hot water poured from it.

"That's the first thing they need!" he said.

Next to the bath is a bed. A change of clothes for men and women is handy, rolled up in neat bundles. I looked round the bare, efficient apartment, and sat down on the suicides' bed, trying to visualize the strange human stories that had ended

The Spell of London

here under a sheet, trying to imagine the tragedies averted by the swift black arrow of the rescue boat and the timely help in this room, where so many times the despairing have been forced back to life.

"Yes, I've seen some dreadful things on that bed," said the policeman.

The patrol boat sergeant lounged against the open door muffled in his big blue coat. Behind him twinkled the river.

"Does a suicide repent and welcome rescue as soon as he touches the water?" I asked.

"Not often," they replied.

"Mostly they fight and try to get back into the water," said the patrol sergeant.

The three of us sat in the Suicide Room, and the two policemen swapped memories of rescues. I wish I could tell some of the stories, but they were not quite—— You understand?

I liked the story of a sudden commotion one night. Man in the river! Out went the rescue boat! The poor fellow had jumped short, and had fallen in the mud: an ebb tide was flowing. They excavated him, and carried him to the bath-room. He looked like a negro. Also life seemed to have departed from him. They scraped him, and came upon good clothes. This was no ordinary suicide! Gradually it dawned on his rescuers that the man was marvellously drunk!

It transpired that he had in a moment of divine afflatus, and inspired by who knows what appreciation of the night and the stars, clambered upon the Embankment to apostrophize the moon. When they had worked on him for some consider-

Our Bridge of Sighs

able time consciousness returned ; and he made the classic inquiry : " Where am I ? "

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I walked up the desolate Embankment, and, leaning for a moment on the stonework, I watched the patrol boat with its little green and red lights go up towards Westminster. In the stern sat the patrol, shrouded to the eyes, peering, flashing lamps, and gazing perpetually over the face of the dark waters.

A Voice in the Night

THE night was so still, so warm, so alluring. London beneath a velvet southern sky. Piccadilly empty in a mellow tunnel of gold light, save for a vague, hovering woman at the corner of Bond Street and a taxicab unloading a cargo of silver cloaks on the doorstep of the Ritz. Two men continued a club argument as they smoked a last cigar at the corner of Bolton Street.

A queer, misshapen thing, the property of the Westminster Council, hummed from a side street like some gigantic garbage beetle and cruised beside the kerb with whirring brushes. It went towards the circus ; and silence came again, a portentous hush, in which the spirit of night seemed to hold its breath, waiting for something to happen in the stillness, in the darkness.

There are nights whose magic lies like a cloak over the spirit. The darkness seems always on the verge of a revelation. Something of that peace which blows through a garden at night glorifies our stone forest as if the million denied flowers shut for ever in the barren earth beneath the pavement were trying to send out a ghostly fragrance ; and in this peace the heart is washed clean of meanness and hard things ; and any drunken beggar receives half a crown. . . .

A Voice in the Night

I turned into Bolton Street, and, walking a little way through the square, came to a side street locked in sleep, in which one lit window shone on a second story : a gold cube against which was etched, jet black, the twisted iron of a balcony. The window was open. The curtain hardly moved in the warm air.

As I was passing on, thinking how, at times, all the heartache and beauty of life can be crystallized for a wanderer in one moment before a lit window, there fell on the night, cool as drops of water, the clear notes of a piano. A woman's hands moving over the keys, softly, caressingly, and, I must confess, not too perfectly, flirting in a tired way with a bar of Grieg, wandering into chords towards a snatch of Schumann. Then silence. Then a provoking little melody picked out with one hand. . . .

I stood there feeling that soon she would slide into music, for I knew she was sitting there unable to choose, like a woman in a garden who must pick just one flower. What would it be? Chopin? Most likely. Or perhaps a foxtrot! How I would laugh and go on. . . .

Then the clear notes trickled once again ; and what followed was so beautiful to me standing out there listening in the night that it seemed for the first time in all my life I had heard the Voice of London, that I had met, as in a fairy-tale, all the magic of this night stored up in one moment.

Out to the darkness came a woman's voice—a soft, warm, little voice, and the song she sang was

The Spell of London

that lovely poem, written three hundred years ago by John Digby, Earl of Bristol :

Grieve not, dear Love ! although we often part :
But know that Nature gently doth us sever,
Thereby to train us up, with tender art,
To brook the day when we must part for ever.
For Nature, doubting we should be surprised
By that sad day whose dread doth chiefly fear us,
Doth keep us daily schooled and exercised,
Lest that the fright thereof should overbear us !

The last notes ran on, like cool water falling,
dropping into the deep pool of the night.

In the room was the deeper tone of a man's voice. The woman answered him. I walked on ; and the desert of the dark London streets blossomed because of the beauty of that moment, that unknown voice in the night. . . .



I might lie to you, to polish a rough incident, and tell you that a London bobby stole up on rubber soles to listen to the song ; that a young rake on his belated way home dashed a tear from his eye and squared his shoulders to life . . . but no ; there was no one else : just an empty street in which I felt again all the aches and ideals of twenty, that sad age.

And I thought that beauty is never thrown away, never wasted, finds its mark always ; and I knew that this voice, which to me was just a lovely expression of a magic night, might be to thousands

A Voice in the Night

something so poignant that the heart would overflow in the ache of it.

Behind our warm-lit windows how often do we think of the pilgrim going by outside, seeing in our life a vision of that which might have been to him, or the distant land of his heart's desire? For there come rare moments to all of us when the spirit waits to be startled out of triviality and brought face to face with something great and true; and such vivid moments, if not always a turning-point in life, are moments when the heart throws wide its doors to receive whatever flies to it from the goodness that is in all men.

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"There is always a thing forgotten when the rest of the world goes well."

whispered through the silent streets:

"The thing on the blind side of the heart, on the wrong side of the door."

Fleet Street

THEATRES have emptied, traffic has thinned, supper-parties have ended with a yawn and a thought of bed. . . .

Fleet Street is working with its coat off. The only bed it officially recognises is that on which a paper is placed every night like a fearsome and truculent infant. Fleet Street never sleeps, and cannot afford to yawn.

For the last twelve hours the known world—and bits of it which are not known—have been flinging news at it by wireless, cable, telegraph, telephone, and luncheon tables. A relentless, doveless deluge.

Moscow has spoken after a long silence. A distinguished Frenchman, with true Gallic manners, waited till the woman he loved had finished dinner before shooting her—an event which had the same effect on Fleet Street that a sudden revolver shot would have on a man of nervous constitution. A correspondent in Peking, whom every one thought dead, has sent in a brilliant despatch; someone has interviewed a foreign Minister, and at Tunbridge Wells a solicitor's dog has swallowed a contested will. In other words, an ordinary night.

The head printer comes into the large room in which Scottish sub-editors in mass formation make mincemeat of other people's work. He walks round with the air of a pirate king. Below ground

Fleet Street

the hungry presses are ready : to-morrow's paper is about to be born.

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It is just that moment when anything may happen : when things invariably do happen. If the dome of St. Paul's decided to fall, this is the nervy hour it would do it ; this is the hour Anarchists decide to kill a President ; the hour the House of Commons would catch fire—for in a few moments the first edition will come thundering from the presses. The rest of London is relaxed ; Fleet Street is taut with nervous energy.

The atmosphere is like that as a great liner waits for the scheduled time of departure. The printer watches the clock ; outside in Fleet Street and its lanes and alleys wait the empty motor-vans. In the circulation department anxious men watch the minute hand as men look up at the face of an enemy who has travelled the world to slay them. . . .

One minute late and the South Wales valley will ask for its London paper in vain.

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The work goes on. The world is still bombarding ! At the foreign desk is a snowstorm of cables. New York and Prague, Winnipeg and Berlin, Paris, Rome, and Vienna. Such variety ! Some man in Washington has had a talk to the President of the United States ; another in Vienna announces

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that a procession of unemployed men smashed a shop window.

Round the home desk the sub-editors work furiously.

In a telephone-box a man shouts over a private wire to a man in Paris imploring him to interview the Quai d'Orsay, or perhaps an actress who has insured her knees for a million francs. A bell rings! The night news editor grows one shade paler, and without a word seeks the reporters. Taxicabs quick! Scotland Yard is raiding a celebrated gambling hell! Two weary young men feel suddenly alive.

In the waiting-room a pale wisp of a man, who restlessly revolves a cap in grimy hands, offers for a guinea to tell how his brother stabbed his wife in Houndsditch.



Suddenly there is a roar, a deep sound that keeps its uniform tone. The machines!

The liner is cast from her moorings! Only by a miracle can that last telegram be delivered from the dock-side. And now over the newspaper office comes something of that cold excitement which fathers know when the doctor, carrying a small bag, goes upstairs. O that poignant eternity before he returns. "A son!" and the father's breathless "Is it—is he all right, not cross-eyed or . . . ?"

Through the hive walks the editor with the cool

Fleet Street

detachment of a captain on the bridge. Men intercept him with contents bills, he looks and walks on. In a carpeted, knowing-looking experienced room a printer puts down a warm, slightly damp, and ink-smelling copy of the first edition.

"Of a son. . . ."

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In the cold morning streets, congested by motor-vans, walk the members of the team, the experienced and the virginal. A "cub" reporter who fancied himself at Oxford as a writer, and during his fortnight has written fourteen thousand words (none of which the public ever saw), wakes up his wife. She rises out of salmon-pink pleats and tries to look interested.

"Tired, dearest?"

"No—my story's in the paper."

"Oh, let me see."

He holds her off while he describes how he went to Devonport to write up the disembarkation of the Atlantic Fleet home on leave. He describes his thousand adventures, the funny things he heard, the men he met, the presents they bought for their families. . . .

"Yes, dear, but let me read it myself."

He unfolds the paper rather sadly, and she reads: "Men of the Atlantic Fleet home on leave landed at Devonport yesterday." Just that!

New to the game, she does not tell him that it is marvellous—"The most brilliant thing she has ever read."

The Spell of London

I looked at that pathetic, timid gathering in the dell and wished that I could make each one beautiful and brilliant; but beauty first! I thought that behind each smiling chorus in London is this saddening assembly fighting to come before the public, fighting terrible odds, unconscious of their shortcomings, terribly uncritical. Some were bold with past experience, some were fresh and shy, some were the kind of girls who on the slightest provocation sing "Where my Caravan has Rested" when anyone calls at Streatham; and some, having passed the Rubicon apparently without a map, had, with a tense effort and a loyal rouge-pot, assembled all that was left of charm and youth with a kind of desperate gallantry.

A woman with a faded air of gentility about her sang a coy ballad too coyly and fumbled with her hands when it ended in a cold, deathly silence.

"I can also dance," she said brightly, and waited. She smiled archly and a tendon in her neck showed like a death warrant.

"Thanks, that will not be necessary," answered a suave voice in the darkness. The pianist plugged away at the next song, and the woman looked suddenly gaunt in the strip of light falling from above. Her coyness fell from her like a cloak flung off, and she walked away with burning cheeks.



Two men in shirt-sleeves walked on and removed the wood. They revealed behind, at a giddy cant, half a sultan's palace and the best part of a

The Front Row

fountain. The girls now looked like slaves ready for execution.

A beautiful girl came forward and sang a coon song in that polite, cold-muffin way English girls sing coon songs. The men in the shadows brightened. Someone said she was a peach.

"I dance," she remarked with a cold, superior air.

"Carry on," said a voice.

She unbuttoned her skirt, took it off, threw it over a chair and danced; a tall yellow-legged nymph with close-cropped, tawny hair. As she danced she smiled. They told her to report on Monday, and she left the stage without looking at the Sultan's victims; but every one of them looked at her and whispered. A few looked as though they resented her.



So it went on. Some they cut short in the middle of a song, some they heard to the bitter end. One by one they drifted away, calm, smiling, indignant, or in tears, according to temperament. It was sadder than any drama, this tragedy behind a musical comedy. I wondered how many were going out to give up, how many were resolved to try again, how many driven by vanity, how many by ambition, how many by hard necessity.

As the last batch walked away over the stage there came through their ranks a blatantly beautiful girl to a slow music of perfume. They looked at her and knew that her fur cost two hundred

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guineas ; that her shoes came from Paris, her complexion from Bond Street, and that her pearls were probably real.

" I'm taking the car," she said to one of the men in the shadows. " And mind you're not late. See ? "

An obedient voice answered.

The expelled visitors cast eloquent glances which may have said : " It can be done, you see ! " or, " It's all a matter of luck," or, . . .

The footlights went out. The carpenters came back with the woodland. High up in some invisible heaven a coarse voice sang :

When I am dy-i-ing,
Lean over me-he-he. . . .

" Well, before you die, Bill, turn off those battens ! " shouted someone.

" Righty-ho," said the voice from the canvas sky. . . .

Then the stage became dark, shadowy, and full of impalpable, sad ghosts.

" Battles Long Ago "

I WENT to see a Great Man in the City. He sits at a polished desk in the heart of a big bee-hive full of mahogany, pretty typists, grubby boys, telephones, and young men in pince-nez.

Behind a grille was an ancient commissioner with a moustache in two colours, due to tobacco, so vast that when he advanced his head towards the brass bars, large portions of this moustache straggled forth into the outside world. He looked at me with the undying eye of a sergeant-major, pushed a pad at me, stuck a huge spatulate forefinger on the pad, barked, " Name ! Business ! " and then shouted, " Tom ! " in a loud voice, whereon six small boys sprang smartly to attention.

Next to the commissioner's gilded cage was a small room with the lost air of all waiting-rooms, in which lingered several people all in advanced stages of depression. A young man, rather obviously after some job or other, pretended to look at a picture of Queen Victoria's Coronation, but really straightened his tie.

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Through the open door I watched the big commissioner boss his Boy Scouts and despatch them to the bank as though he were flinging a flying column to the relief of Lucknow.

The Spell of London

In came a middle-aged man of neat, unprosperous aspect, wearing an old coat but brilliantly blacked boots. He placed a brown paper parcel on the counter, opened a book, got the commissioner's signature, and was just leaving, when he said :

"Ain't you Sergeant B., of the Flankshires ? "

"I am," said the commissioner with the readiness of a man who has nothing to be ashamed of in his life.

"I thought I couldn't have been mistaken," remarked the other man, his eyes straying over the great moustache. "You don't remember who I am, do you ? "

"Was you in the gunners ? " asked the commissioner thoughtfully.

"No. My name's Jones."

"Haven't got you," said the commissioner, puzzled.

"Jones ! " said the other anxiously, as if the name was a kind of pickaxe that would open up the sergeant's memory.

"O Lordy ! " said the commissioner. "I've got you now ! You was Lord Blank's groom when I was his first servant in '95."

A mutual flood of approval descended on both of them. I thought they would get drowned in it.

I found myself smiling with delight at the faces of the two old men. I hoped the Great Man would forget all about me and leave me free to sit and listen to these two hauling at their youth. An amazing conversation took place like this :

"Ravin' lunatics them Fuzzy-Wuzzies was . . .

“ Battles Long Ago ”

here boy, take this up to Mr. Parkinson, . . . and you was with Kitchener too in Khartoum, I remember, . . . tell Mr. Patterson a lady's waiting for 'im, . . . and do you recollect that march after we left Assouan in the heat with every fellow trying not to take a swig at his water-bottle ? Blinkin' awful, wasn't it. And then them blacks, them Fuzzy-Wuzzies with their long sixteen-foot spears with trowels on the end that put the fear o' God in the cavalry, and . . . tell Miss Snipe the lady's called from Badgerton's, . . . and then I shall never forgit the gunboats poppin' off at random in the river and the pot-shots that . . . Tom ! Come here. You know Gracechurch Street ? Well, go on now—quick. . . .”

That's how it went on.

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Mr. Jones, the groom that was, expanded like a passion-flower in the glow of these reminiscences ; his eyes glowed, and he used one or two improper military expressions which seemed quite foreign to his present neat but ungauzy condition.

“ And did you go up with Wingate in '99 ? ” he asked eagerly.

“ Yes,” said the commissionaire, licking a stamp.

“ Then you musta seen the Khalifa at some time or other ? ”

“ Course I did. I saw him at Omdurman when he was organizing some attack against MacDonald's Brigade. You must have seen him

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diving about surrounded by his emirs with a big green flag waving with a silver ball on the top. He was . . . a proper old devil if you like, with a head of hair like a blinkin' doormat, it was, wasn't it . . . just like a blinkin' doormat. . . . *Tom, come 'ere, quick ! "*

"That's right! I took my missus to the Tower of London, last Tuesday, no, last Thursday—no it wasn't, it was Monday—and they've got that green flag we captured at—what was the name of that blinkin' awful place?—hangin' up in the Tower."

"The old Khalifa was killed, wasn't he? "

"Yes. Debrikah, that's the name! "

* * * *

"Come this way, sir! " said an office boy.

I rose reluctantly, just in time to hear the hero of a page of English history send a youth to Cornhill.

All in a Row o o o o o

ANY neat suburban road in London—Golder's Green or Surbiton—and the time is 8.45 a.m.

The bright, assured, and insured-looking houses stand smartly to attention behind strips of juvenile turf. They spread abroad an erroneous impression of originality due to the unexpectedness of a sudden slanting eave or the juxtaposition of Elizabethan woodwork with pseudo-Georgian red brick. At first it seems that each house is different ; then you realize that there are only four types tactfully arranged like chocolates in a box to give an air of variety. Each house contains the same lounge hall, the same Jacobean dining-room suite, the same (to all appearances) dear little wife who, now that the weather has changed, goes out shopping in a nutria coat.

It is important to note that nestling beside the kitchen of each house is a garage containing a partially purchased motor-car. The road glows with a proud but discreet prosperity.

Doors open, gates click, men of forty peck their wives swiftly and stride heavily down the path ; here and there is perhaps a wife who turns a cold cheek to her husband's farewell and watches him suspiciously as he goes ; but next door may be

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seen the passionate embrace of more recent partners whose salad bowls are yet untarnished, whose cutlery is unscratched.

She says : " Don't be late, darling ! "

He says : " I'll catch the 5.15, Popsy ! "

She regards him romantically, and then whispers :

" There's a tiny bit of egg on your moustache, dearest ! "

He removes it, they kiss again ; she watches him go, raises a shapely arm, smiles, departs humming " Tea for two and two for tea . . . a girl for you, a boy for me " . . . pauses and looks happy. . . .



Then other doors open.

From one emerges a small boy. He is dressed in grey flannel trousers, a grey jersey with a grey coat over it and a grey floppy hat. He is five. He is the most interesting person in a road full of human cargo, for he is about to take his first step into life : he is going to a preparatory school for the first time !

His mother, standing at the door, feels silly because she knows that she is going to cry ; and why ? Her baby is going away from her out into the awful lottery of life. That's it ! So small and defenceless he is, and so much hers. He is an open book to her, and now the world is to have its way with him. Nothing belongs to a woman so much as a child—for five years.

All in a Row

"Good-bye, Jack," she says. "Be a good boy."

"Yes, mummy," he replies vaguely, dropping his new pencil-box, which is all the equipment he is taking out into life.

A group of older boys wearing cherry caps pass by chattering.

"Those," says Jack proudly, "will be my friends."

His eyes follow them with deep interest : a man about to take his place in the world of men.

"Yes, dear, and when you come home you will be wearing one of those nice red caps."

"Yes, I shall be a schoolboy then," he reflects gravely.



The first milestone ; and he is so proud ! His mother might feel conscious that his little feet are taking the first step along an alarming road ; that society, by clapping a cherry-coloured cap on his vacant little head, claims him as a unit ; that no doubt the gods of comedy and tragedy sitting up aloft are already regarding him carelessly as they begin to mix that draught of experience which he must drain to the lees. Not so complex ! I think she just feels a bit throaty to see him doing anything quite alone, his babyishness accentuated by his proud pretence at maturity ; and as she watches his little arrogant back I think she feels hurt to think that soon he will be able to do without her. . . .

The Spell of London

"Come along, Master Jack," says nurse.

"Good-bye, my darling," says mother; then she kisses her hand and shuts the door quickly.

* * * *

Dusk falls over the road that so recently was a London meadow. The men come home in waves. Lights glow in windows. Behind the windows? What?

"Have some more trifle, dearest?"

"And then, Madge, I gave it him in the neck. I said, 'Before I came the accounts were in a mess, and now they're straight, and I won't stand any jaw from you or anyone else.'"

"Quite right, dear, the beast! . . . Cream?"

"And I made him apologize! I tell you I made him sit up."

"My clever husband!"

Behind the next window perhaps a woman with a frozen cheek watches the unsuspecting male, waiting the moment to pounce with a quiet but devastating:

"George, who is Phyllis?"

"Phyllis?" (Incredulous surprise.)

"Yes, Phyllis. A letter fell out of your blue coat this morning, and I couldn't help. . . ."

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And, quite near, in other rooms in this road the little boys who have just stepped so innocently into all this life are sleeping with passionate

All in a Row

abandon, their tousled heads deep in pillows, their small hands outside the coverlets, and on a chair beside the bed three virgin exercise books with their surnames written on the cover: their first day's work!

I hope that into these rooms the fathers go reverently to look with a kind of awe at the bad pot-hooks and the A B C D and the 1 2 3 4—those first tiny scratchings on the hard surface of life.

It is very touching, very important, somehow slightly pathetic and altogether rather wonderful.

White Plague o o o o o

A YOUNG man and a young woman marry and accept the great adventure of life as two enthusiastic bathers take to the sea in summer. Everything is so jolly and worth while. Nothing can come between them ; nothing can hurt them now. "I have you and you have me !" they say ; and one of them adds : "For always and always and always."

Then she—or he—develops a queer little dry cough. Nothing, of course, till a definite symptom occurs ; and over the unclouded firmament of two unfulfilled lives passes that awful cloud—consumption. These two young people huddle in each other's arms over the ruin of that which only yesterday seemed so glorious, so invincible, so unshakable. Where there was laughter there are tears ; where there was such faith there is now only hope ; where there was close association there is separation. That is the story behind every other bed in every ward of that great consumption hospital in the Fulham Road. On the other side of the road stands the peril of middle age—cancer ; on this side the peril of youth, the horrible white plague.

* * * *

It was visiting day. Through the gardens of the hospital walked young people arm in arm. It

White Plague

was difficult to tell which was the sufferer and which the visitor save here and there where a young man was holding a bunch of golden daffodils brought to brighten his bedside.

Upstairs, I walked down long corridors split up in a number of small wards, each ward containing no more than five or six beds. In all these wards were young girls. I saw few women older than the early thirties. How pitiable! Youth knocked out at the very start of the race. Unlike some invalids who grow careless and heartsick, these young sufferers were so conscious of their youth, of their beauty. In order to welcome husbands, sweethearts, and parents they had put little touches of vanity to their toilettes; a new blue ribbon threaded through a nightdress, a new lace cap, a touch of pink at a sleeve . . . heartrending, small vanities. . . .

A girl who might have been Rossetti's "Blessed Damosel" sat up in bed with her fine-spun, red-gold hair falling over her alabaster white neck and shoulders; and every time the ward door opened a little flush mounted to her face and the rich curve of her mouth deepened in expectancy; for she was waiting for someone. Poor little wife! Beside her bed was the photograph of a small child.

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"How cheerful they seem, how anxious to laugh and to be petted!"

"That is always the way," said the doctor. "A consumptive even when dying believes that he

The Spell of London

will get well, and the strange thing is that, here and there, a hopeless case does recover. People who have been sent away from here to die in a home have sometimes recovered instead. Some sudden change takes place . . . one cannot say how it happens."



Gradually the wards filled with visitors and flowers. Little tables were buried under cascades of yellow daffodils, primroses, violets.

Young husbands sat on the edge of beds holding the pale hands of young wives, talking, laughing, whispering. Each bedside was a little patch of sacred country on the wrong side of love.

Suffering is bad enough to watch at any time, but when the sufferers are young, when their eyes sparkle with life, when the bed-clothes drape the full, young curves of their bodies, and when their whole attitude denotes a capacity for life and happiness, the sight is ghastly.

In one ward I saw the meeting of four young couples. Four young wives with the seeds of disease in them sparkled as their husbands came in with flowers to tell them the news since last visiting day; the thrilling unimportances of life outside in the great, free, healthy world. And in a corner, a beautiful pale young girl, lying on her side, pretending to read a book, watched. She was too young to have a husband to meet her: life had cheated her out of even that.

In the men's wards it was the same: wives

White Plague

visiting husbands. More pathetic, perhaps, because here it was the woman who was alone in life while the man was chained to a bed, denied his natural part in the struggle of life, his cross of suffering weighted with anxiety for her, and she bravely putting up a good fight, smiling and trying to hide her heart.

Here is Youth crucified. . . .



If you know anything of human nature there is no need for me to tell you of the little plans, the little hopes, the little golden dreams that are born each week when young people in love separated by the white plague hold hands in the grim whiteness of a ward.

It must sometimes take courage to launch a dream on the sea of eternal hope when a pale little woman sets her teeth and determines not to let you see her cough—that racking cough like an iceberg menacing the frail barque—but let us hope and pray that more than once or twice some gallant dream wins home to harbour.

THE room has heavy double doors. As you approach, your guide puts a finger to his lips, makes a face at you, and tip-toes in, you after him.

You are now within earshot of millions of homes. Every vibration in this room is being broadcast by wireless. If you sneezed or hiccoughed, millions of people would think: "That's not Beethoven; what was it?" and you would be led out in disgrace for behaving at 2 L O in a manner unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. As a matter of fact, the tip-toe air, the atmosphere of nodding and mouthing, has a curious effect on you. In most of us there lives a queer little devil who sometimes urges us to fling an egg into an electric fan, to throw an omelet at a solemn person, or otherwise to behave publicly in a Chaplinesque manner. Some vague undergraduate god seems daring us to outrage the proprieties. In 2 L O you have to grip yourself hard in order not to make a sudden noise and pull the leg of the world.

So you occupy your mind by looking round.

The room is thickly carpeted in green. Some woven material drapes the ceiling to condense the sound. A pianola stands in one corner, a grand

piano in another, a string orchestra occupies the centre of the floor. The musicians are so quiet. They are longing to make little toots and tinkles that precede melody. Now and again an anxious player cannot resist the temptation to emit a little ping-ping on a violin (or a little pong-pong on a 'cello), but all the other musicians turn and look at him as if he has committed a sin ; and he swiftly puts his fingers over the strings.

Opposite, like a great, open mouth, is the microphone in a box. It looks rather like a superior gramophone. Suddenly a smart young man in horn-rimmed glasses detaches himself from the grand piano, where he has been whispering into someone's ear, and, walking up to the microphone he says, in a cheery, jaunty way, one hand in his trousers pocket :

"Hallo, everybody ! London calling the British Isles. . . !"

You cannot help smiling. It seems so far-fetched—a joke ! Is it really possible that this young man, standing before a little cabinet in London, is heard in Belfast, in Aberdeen, in the far misty hills and valleys of Wales ? He is apparently not a bit impressed by it. He calls the British Isles in just the same tone of voice he would employ if he met you in the street : "Hallo, old dear, how are you ?" He takes up a programme, and has another word with the Grampians :

"In two minutes the Symphony Orchestra will play the Pilgrims' Chorus from 'Tannhäuser.'"

He strolls away from his old friend the British Isles and goes back to the piano. The conductor

The Spell of London

takes off his coat and hangs it on a chair. Somebody looks at the clock, nods, the conductor gathers his musicians with an upward movement of his hands, down comes his baton, and right out over the British Isles crashes the solemnity of Wagner.



Upstairs I enter another room in which men are pumping Wagner over telephone wires. It is exactly like a telephone exchange. Little black ebony honeycombs stand round it, labelled Newcastle, Aberdeen, Birmingham, Manchester. Coils of cable droop down the walls. There is no sound but the clicking of plugs in black honeycomb.

"The music is amplified here and put over ordinary telephone wires to other towns, where it is sent out by wireless."

"Is there any delay? Does Aberdeen get it a fraction of a second later than Kensington?"

"Not one fraction of a second. When Lord Blank spoke recently in London, people in Aberdeen heard him a fraction of a second before the people at the back of the hall! Sound travelling through the air is delayed: electricity is instantaneous."

A man gave a little touch to a plug and—Manchester was probably delighted.



In the artists' room sit or walk the men and women who are about to face the invisible lions.

2 L O

Some are composed ; some are obviously nervous. One man with a high brow is anxiously reading his lecture, another is chatting nonchalantly in a ripe baritone voice to a friend. A pretty young girl in a silver evening wrap moistens her lips and, nervously clearing her throat, gazes all the time at a song she must know by heart. The door opens.

" Miss . . . er . . . will you kindly . . . ? "

Her time has come ! I want to hearten her. It is obviously her first broadcast. I want to say :

" Cheer up ! All their crystals have gone wrong to-night. Every cat's-whisker is on strike. Just sing to yourself ! "

Then a high and comforting official goes up to her and in the most fatherly way gives her the secret of this strange new art :

" Don't worry," he says. " You'll be splendid. Don't think that millions are listening. Do remember that you are not singing to a massed audience, but just to one man and to one woman sitting together in the evening over their own fireside."

She smiles gratefully, and then goes out quickly to keep her appointment with—the British Isles !

Ghosts and Pickaxes

NO one ever sings an ode to the unknown, undistinguished houses of Camberwell, and suchlike places, which year after year go west to the sound of the pickaxe.

I was walking along a mean, crowded high street, a mass of jangling tramcars and skidding omnibuses, when I came to an old house which stands a few yards behind the shop frontage, and a little to one side, as if it were trying to turn round and forget that the fishmonger lived next door—the old snob!

The last thing that can happen to a house was happening—men were hitting it with pickaxes. The displaced bricks fell in a cloud of white dust, exposing a gaunt, ragged hole through which could be seen a faded bedroom paper, pink rosebuds tied with blue ribbon.

All over London there are such houses, standing in a decayed, alien atmosphere among hundreds of cheap, vigorous little shops. They are the local eyesores.

The spearheads have been snapped from their railings, the few yards of garden have become disreputable, the windows have turned black, and over the walls has crept that unpleasant eczema which afflicts old houses, giving to them that diseased, damp look.

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Ghosts and Pickaxes

When the last tenant dies—for it is impossible to think of anything so lively as a removal—these old houses often become lodging-houses, and sad faces peer from behind the grey lace curtains. Occasionally a young actress alights on them for a week, like a butterfly which has mistaken a dust-bin for a flower. The next stage is a garage, which either fails or succeeds.

If it succeeds the old house is eclipsed by petrol and oil advertisements. It is reconstructed. Green pumps appear in the front garden, so that you would never guess that behind all this coming and going the ancient house lives on.

In the event of failure the house just glooms vacantly, standing behind its rank garden like an old aristocrat so sad, so ill, so miserable that he has even given up dreaming of the old days.

Yet no matter how many windows are smashed, how many tin cans find their way into the garden, how many timber merchants use the stables as a store-room, there is always an air of quality about these old houses, a superiority; they suggest, as they shoulder a greengrocer on one side and an undertaker on the other, that a relic of a finer civilization is lingering in the last agony.

So might a Roman villa in Saxon London have stood among the wattle huts of a less advanced people.

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Bang-smack went the incessant picks, and the dust flew high. . . .

I thought that in 1800 Mr. Timothy Snapper,

The Spell of London

merchant of the City of London, must have been very proud of his country house lying back among the fields, lonely and not too grand, but—just grand enough for a man who might hope to be Lord Mayor and perhaps Sir Timothy Snapper, Kt., J.P. That Corinthian portico ; that spacious flight of steps ! A good house ! And every June day as he rode down to the City on a steady brown mare he wore in his button-hole a rose plucked in the garden.

No doubt he and his Jorrocksy friends often reined up below the portico and drank a glass of sloe gin and ate a slice of damp, sticky plum-cake before they went off to the meet of the local pack. . . .

The tramcars became blocked in a long line, the omnibuses piled up, the wagons with their steaming horses came to a standstill. Bells rang, motor-horns blew. A hawker threw up his head and howled for old bottles.

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I thought that naturally a young man once rode over the fields to the old house to see Miss Emily Snapper—a good-looking young man in a tight claret coat, tight trousers strapped under his boots, and hair so well pomaded that it brought the antimacassar into fashion for the protection of drawing-room chairs.

“Dearest nymph. . . .”

Emily *was* rather nymph-like in flowered soft muslin, girdled under the arm-pits, and falling in

Ghosts and Pickaxes

folds to where her little toes peeped out. In the garden among the roses (where now the oil and colour merchant dumps his drums) this young man dropped on one knee and asked her to marry him.

She, of course, said "Ask father," and father said "No"; so obviously they ran away; he very noble in a claret coat and Hessian boots, she pale and timid, her hands in a muff and her lovely, scared face under the great arch of a bonnet that tied with a large yellow bow beneath her chin.

Did Timothy relent and leave them the old house when he died of port? If that old house could speak, what would it say?



There was a much bigger hole now, and more bedroom paper showing, pink rosebuds and ribbon, and I wondered how many generations of lovers had looked through that window and seen moonlight soft over the fields, and how many babies, their pale, blue eyes wide, had through it taken their first look at life.

Bang-crack went the picks.

And the white cloud rose higher.

One Hour of Life



SHORTLY after noon many unusual people arrive in Leather Lane, near Holborn Circus, to turn an honest penny—sometimes sixpence.

Two negroes wearing silk hats and morning coats erect a little trestle and unpack a bag which contains small paper packets. A young man dressed like a chef wheels into position a barrow on which lies a sack of potatoes. A jazz band appears. Various seedy and several prosperous looking men lurk in the lane, holding carpet bags or old attaché cases. They are all waiting for that stroke of the clock which will release on Leather Lane, from office, workshop, and factory, a flood of clerks, typists, machine hands, artisans, and hundreds of fluffy haired workgirls who, walking arm in arm, contrive at the same time to eat apples or ice cream wafers.

On both sides of Leather Lane stretch booths from which the fruit lover can buy bananas or oranges, from which the connoisseur of old bed knobs, rusty keys, or stray lengths of iron piping can recognize many rare specimens, from which the sweet-lover can purchase everything from milk chocolate to apples soaked in toffee, from which those who desire fish can buy kippers while they watch one of the most loathsome sights in London : the decapitation of live eels and the head that refuses to die.

One Hour of Life

Ting ! The luncheon bell ! Leather Lane prepares to give its daily *matinée*.

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The street is crammed with people. A two-horse dray delivering acid in big glass bottles is hopelessly marooned. Men shout. Crowds collect round any merchant who seems interesting or amusing.

The two negro doctors settle their silk hats on their heads and begin to talk. No symptom is hidden from them. They are realists. As their words strike home men and women part with tuppence and take a little paper packet. The jazz band plays with remarkable skill. The chef takes a potato from his sack and begins to peel it with a small instrument which clips on a knife. He does a brisk trade. The most unlikely looking people exhibit an interest in his commodity : solemn old men, young men. They are told that their wives will bless them for their kind thought !

A little man with a muffler round his throat shows how easy it is to paint a penny silver. Ice cream is being sold in quantity.

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A large crowd surrounds a young man with a humorous, intelligent face. He is trying to sell a gyroscope top. He does it like this :

"Now, look here ! You insert a string like

The Spell of London

this, which doesn't require the genius of a Leonardo da Vinci, does it ? ”

He stops and looks at the rows of stolid faces.

“ Now does it ? No. All right.”

He demonstrates his top. No one buys. He looks round, smiles, and remarks with a fine sarcasm :

“ Do you know, I often think I'll go to the Zoo, but, then, I say to myself, ‘ Why should I do this when I can look at Leather Lane ? ’ D'you know that after you've all done standing round here with your mouths open and your pockets closed this place is covered with apple-cores and monkey-nuts. It is, really ! Why should I go to Regent's Park, I ask myself, and—echo answers why ? . . .

“ To resume. This top is a marvellous invention. . . . You observe that when I hold the string like this it retains its equilibrium—as the scientist would put it—but why I, an itinerant street vendor should use such terms I cannot say, and neither, I suppose, can you. Now those of you who have read Herbert Spencer will possibly know. . . .”

This young man earns his shillings !

* * * *

Before two o'clock men are bearing all manner of things away from Leather Lane. They have found the nut, screw, or bolt that will “ come in useful some day,” they have discovered their imaginations touched by the sudden beauty of painting a penny silver or buying a half-crown box

One Hour of Life

of Turkish delight for fourpence ("flavoured with the jasmine of the mystic Heast").

Then the bell rings. The luncheon hour is over; over is that short ramble among bargains, that glorious uncertainty beside a tray of junk, that harmless half-hour beside a dusky doctor. . . .

The men of Leather Lane, having made their short, swift raid on spare pennies, pack up their trifles and depart whistling!

Sister Anne

IN Bloomsbury there is a captive lady. I have seen her.

She sits at a window in a tall, grim house, too near the roof to be the owner and not quite high enough to be the maid. She reads a lot, I believe, and thinks more than she reads, for whenever I see her she has just looked up from a book, and is gazing down into the rather too consciously respectable square with eyes which may, or may not, see the life that goes on there.

She reminds me of Sister Anne of the fairy-tale turret ; only she is a much older Sister Anne, with a something about her that tells me how long ago she renounced all hope of seeing a horseman come spurring down the road to rescue. She is the lady of the bed-sitting-room . . . "a gentlewoman in reduced circumstances."

"Bed-sitting-room, with use of bath."



There are thousands in London, in every great city, and in many of them a woman is sitting "like Patience on a monument smiling at Grief." It is good for us now and then to know hard times, but it is tragic to fall into that hopeless category among those who "have known better times." Sister Anne has known better times, and that, I think,

Sister Anne

is what she is always thinking about when she forgets to read and sits looking down into that too self-consciously respectable square.

"I remember when my dear Henry was alive," she always says if you listen long enough, for that is the burden of all her thought. Dear Henry, however, died and left her stranded. He either crashed on the Stock Exchange or she discovered that everything was mortgaged, and she turned to face life alone—imagine beginning life alone at fifty—in a bed-sitting-room "with use of bath"!

There is little that Sister Anne can do. What can a woman who has been nursed all her life learn at fifty? Sometimes I think I have seen her steal into Bond Street shops trying to look like a customer. She unwraps a brown paper parcel and takes out embroidery, for her mother fortunately taught her to be "clever with her needle." They give her a few shillings and some more work. Out into Bond Street she goes, still trying to look like a customer, for, you see, she has the pride of the poor and the shame of "having known better days."

"Poor thing!" they say in the shop. Or perhaps: "Do you remember when Mrs. X used to drive up in her carriage?"



In the bed-sitting-room in Bloomsbury are those few things which she managed to snatch from the creditors and the auctioneer; a silver frame, that

The Spell of London

looks so alien in a tawdry room, from which dear Henry gazes out with the blithe and dashing expression so characteristic of his more prosperous day. A chair or two ; a carriage clock ; useless knick-knacks which look as queer in that nakedness as the strange things the sea leaves when the tide goes out. . . . Sometimes there is a photograph of a child who, had he lived, would be a man now capable of picking his mother up from the humiliation of a bed-sitting-room.

* * * *

In the winter, when coal is dear, Sister Anne leaves her turret and spends the day in the rest rooms of the big Oxford Street stores, writing innumerable letters, reading magazines, and watching other women ; remembering things about the other half of her life.

Or she haunts like a ghost those parts of good hotels where there is no danger of being handed a bill. The porters and the clerks know that she has no appointment in the lounge or the writing-room. Sister Anne just sits there because it is warm, and because it is what she was once accustomed to before dear Henry escaped from this life. Poor, faded Sister Anne.

London is very cruel to the lonely.

As long as you have a pound note to squander you find a friend. When the last penny goes, and you are too proud to exhibit your poverty, Solitude and Memory perch on your window-sill like birds of ill omen ; and you grow inward and talk

Sister Anne

to them, and people think you are talking to yourself.

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So whenever I walk through Bloomsbury and see Sister Anne's refined white face at a window, I wonder why some of the altruism that runs waste does not trickle in her direction.

How much happiness a Bed-Sitting-Roomers' Club would bring into the world I am not prepared to say, knowing a little of human nature. But it always seems to me that if Sister Anne could, without any loss to her dignity or any hint of that kind of charity which thrives on the enjoyment of pitying, be drawn away from that lonely window she might learn how to smile again—as she did before poor dear Henry with characteristic dash flung his widow at Fate.

The "Junior Turf" o o o o

A GAINST the trees of the Green Park, which it matches exactly in colour, stands on the edge of the roadway the Junior Turf Club. It is fifty years old.

Ah, how the old men in club windows prick up their ears ! (What a pretty girl Nellie was till she opened her mouth ! An English rose with thorns for a voice !) How these old solemn men smile to themselves and remember a day before " Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-de-Ay," when they used to wait outside stage doors with bunches of roses—how naïve our fathers were !—and watch dawn break over the Green Park to the cheering scent of sausage and mash and—well ; the Junior Turf Club knew them all, knew Debrett and Burke's Peerage from page one onwards, and the Gaiety chorus from Alice right through the alphabet !

But times are changed ! Years ago the Westminster Council said that if the Junior Turf desired to hand out sausages to the nobility and the frivolity it would have either to pay rates or shut its doors ; and the people who lived over the way said that although they loved life and laughter they hated them in the middle of the night, so the Junior Turf Club, being only a cabman's shelter—but the most famous shelter in London—pulled itself together and decided to keep its sausages within bounds, which is legal and proper.



The "Junior Turf"

I passed by recently and looked in.

Taxicab drivers, following an ancient custom, can eat roast beef at any time of the day or night. It was 11 a.m., and the ribs of beef were on the table.

The Junior Turf always smells hearty. There is a pre-cocktail era relish about it. Just to smell it in the middle of the night was to feel hungry. I say "was," because when it ministered to exhausted humanity London was a city without a night club. The Junior Turf, standing so modestly on the edge of the road hard by the Ritz, is the humble parent of all these gilded dens which add to the expensive boredom of our times. It is the grandfather of *Ciro's* and the Embassy!

"Where can I get something to eat, cabby?"

"You come along o' me, captain."

That—so bad old men tell me—is how it used to go on. And the old cabby, scenting a meal at the expense of his fare, would whip up the horse and make for the Junior Turf.

Here, in the tiny box, or in neighbouring cabs, would be gathered a distinguished company drawn together in the dead of a London night by a passion for bacon and eggs or toad-in-the-hole. While all London was a black desolation the little green Junior Turf shone like a good deed in a hungry world.

It is whispered that now and then a beggar by the park rails would peer into a cab in those old, far-off days and see the bearded face of a royal prince who, homeward bound after a late party, had stopped at the Junior Turf for a cup of coffee

The Spell of London

which a palace could not provide at 3 a.m. Of course this may be a rumour. . . .



"Can no one tell me the history of the Junior Turf?"

All the taxicab drivers were young men. To them it was just a shelter, and the memory of old days just a scandal. But I found an old driver who told me he had driven a horse cab forty years ago.

"All sorts I've seen there!" he said. "It isn't allowed now. In the old days everybody knew it. I couldn't tell you all the 'nobs' I've driven there in the middle of the night. . . . In recent days the man who loved to eat in cab shelters was the late Sir Ernest Shackleton.

"He liked us and we liked him. He used to bring down great big books of photographs, and talk all night sometimes about his travels. He was a rare sportsman. When we got orders to serve no more food he was that sorry that he had a little table made that just fitted into his taxicab, and he'd drive up in the night, and insist on his sausage and mash, sitting there in his cab and talking to us. . . ."



"But the old days were the times, sir! Everybody liked the old London cabby. We were a bit rough and talkative, but there was no harm in us. Nowadays the London taxicab driver isn't too

The "Junior Turf"

popular, because when the young ones joined the mechanical transport during the war a lot of pretty tough customers got licences and didn't play the game.

"You can't blame the public for giving the taxicab driver a bad name. But that's dying now. Most of the rough sort have gone and the boys have come back, and I don't think you'll find a better crew of fellows anywhere. The public don't forget the war-time driver, and I don't blame 'em, sir."

I looked up at the Junior Turf Club, no longer a haven, no longer (let me say in a loud voice) a generous distributor of midnight sausage, no longer a romantic oasis in the darkness of a sleeping city in which you might find a yawning beauty, a crumpled peer, a prince, a pauper, or a rake.

Miss Jones in Bagdad



"OH . . . blow! Another ladder!"

Miss Jones hits her Remington savagely and swears that she will never again buy good stockings. That's what comes of wearing her best pair of non-stop silk on a week-day. If she had been Lady This or Lady That lounging about in a motor-car all day she expects that her lovely pair of crunchy ones would have lasted for years; but just because she was nearly run down by an omnibus at the Bank and had to jump for her life . . . oh, blow! (I may remark that when you are trying to dress like a duchess on seventy shillings a week a ladder is a tragedy.)

So when the typewriters are sheeted, and silence falls over the City of London, Miss Jones takes an omnibus to Bagdad to repair the damage. She crosses Piccadilly, walks up Shaftesbury Avenue, turns leewards up Rupert Street, enters Little Putney Street, and right opposite is Bagdad-in-the-West, known to thousands of girls who walk in fear of ladders as Berwick Market.



Berwick Market was patented in Bagdad and Jerusalem centuries ago. In sun or rain the shop awnings come down and meet the canvas roofs of a continuous line of street booths, so that when you

Miss Jones in Bagdad

walk on the footpath you go through a dark tunnel of canvas, just like a Jerusalem *souk*. If all the Jews in Berwick Street would wear long false beards one day it would be possible to take a photograph which any short-sighted traveller would swear was Jerusalem !

A glorious colour is given to Berwick Street by thousands of silk stockings. Every shade of sunburn is there, from the boiled shrimp to the colour of a brunette spending a holiday in Jamaica. Those stalls that do not sell silk stockings sell other necessary and unnecessary female garments with true Oriental candour. (Berwick Street is the one proof this age possesses that the corset is not quite extinct.)



As Miss Jones goes thoughtfully through Bagdad sharp dark eyes realize that she requires silk stockings. If Joan of Arc went to Berwick Street in full armour they would think the same about her.

"Now, miss, four and six a pair, any colour ! The very same you pay ten shillings for anywhere else ! Look for yerself. . . ."

Miss Jones goes critically onward, neglecting the soft blandishments of ripe young Rebeccas and the advice of their smart younger brothers. As she proceeds she sees dozens of girls like herself who have chinchilla minds and coney incomes carefully picking over stalls burdened with every kind of attire, smart, flashy, and slightly elegant.

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The Spell of London

Miss Jones toys a moment with quite a good white fox fur that would look so nice with that snuff brown coat and skirt of hers ; but it's far too much ! She sees a tea-gown with the authentic plainness and simplicity about it that tells her it began life in higher circles.

" Now, that's a snip, miss. Just your style ! "

She moves on to her particular stall.

Her hands dive into silk stockings neatly packed in long cardboard boxes, lying in peachy heaps, and waving limp, distorted legs as they trail unhabited from the roofs of stalls. Ah ; the right smart shade, the right subtle tint ; not that cheap pink, or that common reddy brown !

" Six shillings ! "

" Four and six," says Miss Jones, who knows the price to a penny.

An argument inseparable from Jerusalem or Bagdad follows at once.

" Then five shillings and sixpence to you, miss."

" Four and six," says Miss Jones coldly and with hauteur.

" Be a sport and split the difference—five bob ! "

" I said four and six and I mean four and six," replies Miss Jones.

Contemptuous looks pass and Miss Jones, with a faint shrug of pretty shoulders walks quickly away ; but not far ! Although she has not travelled in the East she has instinct.

" Miss, one moment ! Take 'em. They're the last pair ! "



Miss Jones in Bagdad

Through the dim gloom of Bagdad-in-the-West walks Miss Jones with the comforting knowledge that on the morrow a close observer regarding her will find her irreproachable. ("Ooh; what a lovely blouse!" Impossible; she just owns the omnibus fare home to England!)

The Glad Hand



HE is one of life's little insincerities. You have not seen him for years ; you have, in fact, forgotten his existence and he yours. Suddenly, from the mystery of a London crowd, he springs at you with an overjoyed expression and two outstretched hands. At first you think that a stranger has mistaken you ; then, vaguely, you remember him. His eyes are shining with delight, and from this overpowering affability you instinctively withdraw, feeling that, in a comparative stranger, it is almost indecent.

" Well, well, well ! " he gurgles, breathing all over you. " If it isn't dear old Henricus ! Put it there, my boy ! "

You have no alternative. A dog would bite him, a child would run away, but you, being a full-grown man, are forced to stay and play out the farce to the end.



" How are you, Jones ? " you say, inwardly congratulating yourself that you have got his name right first time.

" In the pink, old dear, in the pink ! " he replies (he says everything twice) ; " Jove, I'm glad to see you ; I'm glad to see your dear old face again ! "

The Glad Hand

You wonder why. You are not glad to see his. You do not dislike him, and you do not like him : he is just one of millions outside your life ; yet he behaves as if he owned the corner seat in your heart.

You endure his attitude, feeling mildly hard-hearted and wishing that you, too, could join with him in being pleased. Are you misanthropic ? Yet you cannot let yourself go ; some shrewd instinct tells you to keep your mouth shut because you realize that he is quite insincere ; a glad hand merchant, full of what the Americans call " blaa."

" I'm doing marvellously . . . marvellously ! " he rejoices, hitting your shoulder heartily. " I've just bought a brand new forty-five horse-power Flick and I'm off to France next Monday with the wife and kids. Going down to Monte, and then probably Italy. Have a cigar ? "

" No ; I never smoke them ! "

" A cigarette ? This side. They're special Turkish I have made for me ! "

He looks at you intently, hits you on the chest, smacks your shoulder, and tells you that you look ill.

" Look here ! " he cries. " Why don't you come with us ? "



This friendliness is staggering. You are divided between wonder at it and horror at the thought of being alone with him for a day. You point out that you have work to do and certain responsibilities. He waves them away.

The Spell of London

"Nonsense, my dear old thing! Snatch a fortnight, snatch a fortnight!" he says airily. "By the way, you've met my wife, haven't you?"

You say that you think you have. There is a pause. You try hard to fill it with some innocuous remark before he invites you to go and stay with him for ten years.

"Jove! I shall never forget that speech you made at the dinner," he says moistly. "I often sit and think about it. It was dashed good."

"When was that?"

"Do you mean to say you've forgotten? And old Brown, the chairman, and Robinson, who—by the way, Robinson's dead!"

He peers at you sadly, expecting you to burst into tears; but you cannot remember Robinson. He might just as well become emotional about Julius Cæsar. You half like the man. What a beast you are—selfish, self-centred. What right have you to drop old friends? He seems to represent a forgotten world which is aching for your return. How awful it is to be loved and not to love.



"Come to dinner to-night?" he flashes at you.

This sobers you. You fend him off. You say good-bye, but he comes back as if unable to leave you.

"Have you heard this one?"

You say "Ha, ha," and try to laugh. He lands a farewell hit at you and departs. You go on,

The Glad Hand

congratulating yourself that you are alone again ; but you are not. He is at your side.

"Look here," he cries urgently. "If you *do* think you can snatch a fortnight, ring me up."

"I will," you say.

"But you don't know the number."

"No ; of course not. What is it ?"

"Here's my card ! Now, don't forget ! We expect you ! Don't let us down ! We won't hear of a refusal ! Good-bye, old dear ; it's done me good to see you ! Good-bye ; and, look here, if you see Brown at any time . . ."



Eventually he goes.

You walk on with the certain knowledge that he has by now forgotten you. You wish you had agreed to invade his holiday just to see the effect of the shock on him. You also wonder what would have happened had you asked him to lend you five pounds !

A Screen Drama

I WONDER how many among the thousands who walk down Monkwell Street, near London Wall, every day of the year, know the story of the Man with Two Lives? Tucked away between warehouses and offices is the hall of the Worshipful Company of Barbers. I entered the courtyard and rang the bell.

"I want to look at the screen," I said.

"Come in."

I was led through an admirable hall into a much decorated early-Stuart court-room that escaped the Fire of London. In this room, built over a much earlier hall, the barber surgeons met to discuss mediaeval shingles and Tudor appendicitis, till the surgeons grew too clever for the barbers and were separated by Act of Parliament in 1745.

The screen I had come to see was standing behind the door. There are millions of screens in the world, but I think none has a history to compare with this; as you shall judge.



In the year 1740 the body of a notorious criminal was cut from the gallows at Tyburn and sent to the Barbers' Hall for dissection. I think the company were granted four bodies a year. A member of the company accepted the body, and

A Screen Drama

was preparing it for the post-mortem when he was astonished to observe signs of life, very slight, very uncertain. You can imagine how, torn between astonishment and professional enthusiasm, he set to work to make that "dead" man's heart beat again. When he had worked over the body for some time it became obvious that the hangman had been cheated. The criminal was alive!

His heart gained strength, the blood began coursing through his veins, and, at length, his eyes opened! What a situation for both men! The criminal in that second when his brain awakened, still packed with last-minute reflections, his ears still hearing the shouting of the mob that had seen him at the gallows, must have imagined himself in heaven or hell! The anatomist, too, must have suffered a shock; he had given life back to a criminal. What should he do? What would you have done? Would the man belong to the law or to your sense of humanity?

The surgeon, sitting in the dissecting room with the man who was officially dead, decided that his resurrection must be kept dark. He was forced to inform the other anatomists who were ready with their knives. He told them. They agreed that the poor wretch had atoned for his sins, and that they would have to stand by him in his rebirth. They fed, clothed, and hid him, and one dark night, when he was strong enough to travel, they gave him money, wished him luck, and shipped him to the Continent.

The man who had been hanged departed gratefully.

The Spell of London

One wonders, for details are scarce, if he left a wife to mourn him, or children who thought him dead.



The story does not end here.

Years passed by. One day there arrived at the Barber Surgeons' Hall a richly decorated screen. It was from the man who had been screened! It appeared that he had begun a new life under a new name, had made good, and was a rich and influential merchant in the Levant.

"It's a wonderful old screen," said my guide.

"Indeed it is," I replied.

I found it more interesting than Holbein's picture of Henry VIII granting a charter to the company, a picture which Samuel Pepys tried to buy after the Fire of London for two hundred pounds, because, as he naïvely admitted, it was well worth a thousand pounds. How much it is worth now it is impossible to say. The Prince Consort was so fond of it that he used to visit it frequently, and he even persuaded the company to send it to Buckingham Palace for a month. A royal commission inspected it later, and tried to decide whether its life in the atmosphere of the City was injurious to it. They hung in the room specimens of colours for many months, but when no change took place they decided that it would come to no harm in Monkwell Street.

There is a story that Robert Peel admired it so extravagantly that he wanted to sleep on the table

A Screen Drama

in the court-room, so that it would be the first thing he would see in the morning.

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But give me the symbolic gift of "the man who was hanged."

There are few such human relics in the world. It stands there, its paint still vivid, a testimony to the queer ups and downs of human life, a proof that while there is life there is hope, a faded sermon from another day telling us that no matter how bad a man may be he sometimes seizes a second chance and takes a grip on life.

Under the Arch

IF you wish to feel your heart touched one moment and to rock with laughter the next, come with me any Wednesday evening to a gloomy railway arch off the Camberwell New Road.

Fifty men, women, and children sit on wooden benches in the gloom, facing each other across the rough stone floor. Each one of them holds a cat or a dog. Some of them nurse sacks that writhe indignantly. Each one has a story. Prince swallowed a needle, Jenny was run over by a brewer's dray, Alf's tail won't wag, something queer has happened to Beauty's left ear . . . see how it droops! This is Sister Mabel's Free Dispensary for Animals of the Poor. Here come all the comedy and tragedy that can happen to a dog or a cat in Camberwell. . . .

It is a poor place. Just a railway arch. It is as poor as the animals it helps, yet for four years it has been famous all over Camberwell and South London. A surprising little smiling woman, known to every cat, dog, goat, donkey, and canary in Camberwell, opened this place of healing four years ago, with the help of Lord Hertford, and ever since Sister Mabel has been smiling benevolently, looking at her bankbook and believing in Providence.

* * * *

A silver-haired man with a fine face stood under

Under the Arch

a gas jet in a tiny room—Mr. Murt, the “vet.,” who for four years has crossed London every Wednesday to give his services free and to put in a week’s work in four hours just because—well, there is something in the eyes of a suffering animal that grips the heart.

One by one the people sitting in the adjacent archway entered the tiny consulting-room. A girl came in, a handsome grey-eyed girl.

“What’s the matter with Chum?” she asked, lifting a collie to the table.

“Mange,” said Mr. Murt promptly. “Now take this ointment and cut off his coat and . . .”

A dramatic change came over the girl. Her arms went round the dog. She might have been acting for a film.

“Chum, Chum!” she said. “Your lovely coat! Isn’t that rotten?”

She looked up from the mangy fur, and two tears fell.

“He won’t let anyone but a policeman touch me,” she said. “He’s my guardian, he’s my . . .”

Chum licked her hand, and two more tears fell. Then, swift as a flash, she smiled and wagged her finger at the dog.

“You bad boy,” she cried, “you’ve caught this from your wives! Serve you right, Chum! Didn’t I tell you to keep away from the girls?”

“Are things always as funny as this?” I asked the “vet.”

“Oh, that’s nothing!” he said.



The Spell of London

In came a ragged old woman wearing a black straw hat and a sack round her waist. She had no teeth. She emptied a sack, which she carried, on the table. Out came a large, injured-looking black cat.

"He's getting better!" shouted the old woman with the vigour of the stone deaf.

"Yes, he is!" yelled Mr. Murt in her ear.

"How I've persevered with that there medicine!" shrieked the old woman.

"Go on with it!" bellowed the "vet."

Then the old, gnarled hands picked up the cat, and the old eyes grew tender. "There, there, Tibby!" she shouted, in what was meant to be an intimate whisper. "You'll soon be well!" and I knew that the big black cat was the only living thing on earth that this poor woman had to love.

For an hour I watched this: pups run over by motor-cars, dogs with mange and distemper; and always such love, such tender looks, such tail waggings from the dogs, till:

"Please, mother says will you have Arfur killed, 'cause the lady upstairs says she'll turn us into the street if he don't stop barkin'."

Arthur, a nice little fox terrier, stood there with his head on one side, so pathetically unconscious of crime, so pleased with life, and—so near to death.

"You can't kill him?" I said.

"We do our best not to," said Mr. Murt. "We have a register of those willing to take dogs. We keep these poor little chaps and try to find them

Under the Arch

homes, but if we can't . . . it's better than having them kicked about the streets starving."



"What's that queer sound?" I asked.

It came from an inner room: a regular beat like a muffled engine. I went in. Six big galvanized boxes with glass lids stood by the wall. From one of them came this strange sound. In a corner lay a pile of poor stiff little corpses, cats and dogs: the unwanted, the maimed, the victims of street accidents. I looked through the glass of the box from which the sound came. Inside was a small black spaniel, unconscious, his legs running, running into death, his claws hitting the tin sides of the box regularly, growing weaker and weaker and weaker.

Run over, maimed! A weeping child asks: "Please will you make him well again?" and the "vet." looks from the child's red eyes to the dog's deep sad eyes and knows that nothing can be done. They must say good-bye.



"I dream," said little Sister Mabel to me, "of an animals' hospital here some day where I could do so much more."

"And if I were a millionaire," I replied, "I would take out a cheque book now and make your dream come true."

A breathless girl came up with a pink-nosed bull-pup.

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"Please, Sister," she gasped, "mother says will you kill it 'cause she's got too many children."

Sister Mabel picked up the fat white pup, which licked her neck, and she called for the list of "dogs wanted"—a book of life and death.

Keeping an Eye Open



BEHIND the counter sit (unusual sight) policemen without helmets. They are writing. They write with that diligent expression common to all literary policemen.

Facing them, crowding round the counter, are men and women of a strangely varied kind. No other room of this size in London holds so many different types. This is the Aliens Registration Office in Bow Street Police Station, and the walls are lined with a card index packed with foreign names. Here are known the name, home town, business and address in England of every foreigner in this country, their wives, their families, and all manner of intimate details. Every time a foreigner leaves London he has to tell Bow Street about it, and when he returns he has to inform Bow Street that he is here again. (And this is the country that once held open house to the world!)



The crowd seeking registration contains men and women who are obviously alien; swarthy men, sloe-eyed women, and olive-skinned children—Slavs, Japanese, a stray Chinese, talkative Frenchmen, whose square black beards hide their ties; plain, middle-class Frenchwomen, hand-in-

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hand with big sons in sailor suits. Others present seem remarkably English till they talk in German or Scandinavian ; some hail, without doubt, from the land of the Stars and Stripes.

" See here ! " says an American, " I'm back in London ! "

He pushes over grey papers bearing his photograph.

The policeman turns round, pulls out a drawer in the wall, picks up a card, and says :

" You left Stratford-on-Avon last Wednesday, didn't you ? "

" I guess so. "

Wonderful system ! Here is a net spread out over the country to catch the undesirable.

" It's a darned nuisance," says the American, " all this hokum. "

" Well, you see, sir, it's necessary," replies the constable. " We know you are all right, but some people want watching. "

" I get you. The innocent sufferin' for the guilty. "

" That's it. "

Bang goes the Bow Street mark on the papers, and the American walks out with the freedom of London in his pocket.



A pretty girl comes in and breaks into attractive French-English. She is excited. She wants to tell the story of her life. Bow Street is a cold, unemotional spot, and the young police officer

Keeping an Eye Open

allows her to empty her heart completely before he asks her a few pointed questions :

“ So you're a governess ! ”

She waves her hands and leaps into explanation. The policeman sighs heavily.

“ Don't go off the deep end again, miss,” he pleads. “ Are you or are you not a governess ? ”

They straighten that out. He stamps the necessary documents, and off she goes. The policeman then turns to register a Pole or a Dutchman with the calm of a granite statue. He is used to the whole world.



Sometimes there arrives a test case in patience.

This proves that the London policeman is the most considerate and helpful policeman on earth.

An Oriental with narrow startled eyes in a large expanse of yellow face comes up and begins making queer noises with his mouth. The policeman reaches the conclusion that he is speaking either Japanese, Siamese, or Chinese. He scratches his ear with a pen and looks thoughtful.

“ Where do you live ? ” he asks hopelessly.

The alien returns a blank stare.

“ Live ! ” shouts the policeman, who believes, like so many, that if a foreigner cannot understand, it helps to shout English at the top of your voice.

The mystery man shakes his head.

“ Live ! ” repeats the policeman. “ Sleep, then ? ”

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He places his hands together and puts his cheek against them, closing his eyes. This electrifies the applicant.

"Huggleboff!" he says brightly.

The policeman ponders.

"Say it again slowly!"

"Huggleboff. . . . Huggleboff. . . ."

"Bill, where's Huggleboff?"

The policeman is forced to consult his colleague. Their worthy faces peer at the foreigner; they persuade him to say it again and again, only to descend deeper into doubt. After half an hour's work the foreigner has a brilliant inspiration, and pulling out a much-thumbed map of London places his finger promptly on Hammersmith.

"Well, I'll be dashed! Why didn't you say so?" asks the policeman.



So the mental wrestling match continues. The room fills and empties every fifteen minutes. In the corner remains an exhausted policeman and a man making funny sounds that seem like :

"Hikklegobble."

"Bill," says the policeman to his friend wearily but kindly, "we were getting on a fair treat and now he's said that."

Bill looks sympathetic and comes over to help.

Nobody's Women



SHE was sitting on a doorstep near Ludgate Hill. It was bedtime.

A late Liverpool Street omnibus came down Fleet Street full of people anxious about the last train to Ilford. In another hour the best part of eight million people would have locked their front doors and have sought rest in the security of their own homes. . . .

This woman was alone on a doorstep ; her roof the cold night sky ; her bed, stone ; her covering, a thin white mist like a winding sheet that was slowly creeping over Blackfriars from the dark, silent river. At first sight, she resembled a vague bundle of rags hunched up against the door, lying in the shadow with grey hair escaping from an incredibly ancient bonnet that had once been rather rakish. Round her shoulders was a torn and dirty plaid shawl, and her boots had, when they were young, belonged to a man. Lying in a bar of light cast from a street lamp was a thin, claw-like hand, deformed by rheumatism, brown, horrible ; and also pathetic, because it had outlived the plough to which it had been set.



Who was she ?

I suppose every man who lives in London has

The Spell of London

at some time or other asked himself this question as he sees Nobody's Women lying in doorways, trying to snatch a moment's sleep on an Embankment seat, stretched full length on the pews of merciful St. Martin's crypt with white hair on a pile of prayer books.

An abandoned woman, old, ugly, and helpless, flung on the scrap heap, is the most hideous of all Nature's jokes.

Perhaps forty years ago some man compared her eyes with stars and thought her shoulders—those shoulders leaning now against cold stone—the most perfect beauty on earth as they peeped from a thin gown. No doubt she once inspired all the good in a man—or all the bad. And now : Nobody's Woman. . . .

What stories lie behind each of these lives : stories of bad luck and bad character ; stories, no doubt, of supreme self-sacrifice, trust, faithfulness, and betrayal. If it were only possible to flash a light back over the lives of these failures what would we see ? In some we would be able to forecast the end, no doubt ; in others the end by contrast with the beginning would horrify us. We read in the " Thousand and One Nights " of beggars who become princes and in a night descend again into the gutters, and we think this a marvellous romance : yet here in London, as in Bagdad, the ups and downs of life lie tossed about street corners for anyone to see.

Dull, mercifully comatose. Nobody's Women drag themselves about the streets at night looking for a place in which to rest their unwanted bones.

Nobody's Women

Sometimes you see them creeping like ghouls round the galvanized tins which the restaurants put outside in the streets in the small hours of morning, digging into the foul rejections of other people's dinners with poor, claw-like fingers which once—who knows?—were lovely and white round the stem of a champagne glass.



The human heart so often outlives the body that I wonder how many of these old wrecks tossing about the world are already dead to feeling, untouched by humiliation; for it is possible for a human being to be dead to everything but memory. I wonder how many live with the knowledge that the dream is over, yet eternal; that the present is nothing, the future nothing, the past the only thing of which life cannot cheat you.

I have heard so many strange things that it would not surprise me to hear a voice from the rags cry: "Go away, with your sentiment and your speculations, you fool; I have once been happy. I was once beautiful. I was once loved. . . ."



The hair lay in thin wisps, that brown, wrinkled hand lay listlessly in the bar of light; and the rags stirred uneasily against the stone.

I went up to salve my conscience, to make myself feel comfortable at the cost of half a crown, but when I drew near I realized that it would be terribly cruel to do anything, for she was fast asleep.

Gold Watch Men



IT is a well-known maxim in certain walks of commercial life that if you can wait long enough a mug will always arrive on the scene.

The three men near the door, who were trying to look like the general public, bore a strong racial and family resemblance to the auctioneer. They edged up when I arrived ; and I could feel the mental telepathy go from head to head—
“ The Mug, bless him ! ”

The shop was in a condition of delirious altruism. Posters inflamed the little side street with news of incredible bargains. I received the impression that wrist-watches, gold cigarette cases, and safety razors had been having a race down the hill of reduction and had collapsed together in a heap in the window.

Looking beyond the little table drawn up in the shop door, behind which stood the auctioneer, I could see shelves dominated by simpering china shepherdesses and sweet-faced china dogs. There were also several bronze men who had forgotten to put on their trousers before they attempted to control runaway horses.

“ And now,” said the auctioneer, “ will any gent give me a bob for this fountain pen ? ’S’worth ten shillings ! ”

There was a sticky pause. Then :

“ I will,” brightly responded the fattest relative.

Gold Watch Men

"You're a sport! Gimme a penny!" said the auctioneer, throwing the pen towards his relation, and accepting in exchange a penny on whose well-worn surface Britannia and King Edward were dizzy with passing to and from the auctioneer all day long!



In fifteen minutes I was sorry for the fat man. His pockets bulged with cigarette cases, fountain pens, pen-knives, cigarette holders, safety razors; and still the fish was not nibbling. It was becoming rather unpleasant. The auctioneer contrived to make me feel ashamed. He started to give the fat man things in the most open-handed and embarrassing way: somebody trusted him, somebody was a real sport, but, more important than anything—somebody trusted him!

"'Ere, put this in your pocket! When a man trusts me I stand by him."

A briar pipe flew through the air.

(I stood watching such a silly china shepherdess who was engaged in the act of curtsying in my direction. I remembered that when I was a small boy I used to scatter handfuls of ground-bait into the water before angling for little fish.)

The family were beginning to hate me, and I wondered whether they would have the honesty to say: "Oh, do go away and let's have a quiet smoke!" Then I became aware of a certain access of briskness. A man with a droopy moustache was standing next to me! He offered

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a shilling for a pen. It was given to him for a penny. A man and a woman joined us. The man wanted to buy a pen, but his wife whispered, "No, no, don't you!" The auctioneer, hearing this, seemed cut to the heart. With a generous gesture he asked the man with the drooping moustache to accept this second pen as a gift, because—he never could resist a good sport!



"And now, ladies and gents," said the auctioneer, mounting a rostrum, "here is something worth buying. It's my last lot to-day!"

He placed on the table a woman's glittering gold wrist-watch.

I admired the way he kept things going. The crowd was just like a herd of deer. You can coax a herd to you, but one sudden movement and it is off to cover. We were like that.

Still things were looking pretty bad. The family ran up the bidding to eleven shillings. The man with the moustache offered twelve shillings. A fresh-faced young man in front offered fifteen shillings. I had not noticed him before: he was obviously a little too anxious to buy the watch. He turned round to cast a swift look at his rival, which I thought a most inartistic action. Then this young man ran up the bidding to eighteen shillings. People pulled themselves together and left. The party was breaking up.

With consummate skill the auctioneer held the man with the drooping moustache; he reminded

Gold Watch Men

him of the two pens worth one pound which had cost him one penny. Two more shillings and the woman's rolled gold wrist-watch was his! One pound and worth ten! Come along now! The little man wavered, was just about to bid, then, thinking that either the watch or the woman was not worth it, shook his head and walked out. I admired the sporting way the auctioneer took his defeat. He knew that there was no other buyer, so, casting a quick glance at the suspicious young man, he sold him the watch for a crumpled pound note. Very pretty!



I walked slowly down the side street and into the main road. At the corner the fresh-faced young man was talking to a girl.

"It's nice, isn't it?" he was saying.

"Oh, but you shouldn't have!" she replied, holding the frightfully gold wrist-watch to catch the sun.

The Children's Ward ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡

HIGH up on the top floor of the Charing Cross Hospital is the children's ward. A fat Teddy Bear stands in smug cheerfulness by the door. Rich, red marigolds in a slant of sunshine as though self-illuminated. Each cot contains a small child.

Some are asleep, their little heads lost in white pillows, a picture-book flung aside on the bed, small fists clutching the sheet as if in need of something to hold in this first unfair conflict with life. Crazy temperature charts hang by each bed, up and down like the plan of a switchback railway. The sister walks softly to a cot, places her cool hand on damp curls, gives a swift glance to the chart, and sighs; or smiles and passes on. In many beds children are playing quietly with bricks and dolls, or sitting up with wide eyes, singing little songs to themselves, or proving their recovery by pretending to hide beneath the clothes as we approach.



I stop at the bedside of a beautiful girl of eight. The bedclothes outline her straight, slim little body. Her skin is pure pink and white, her hair spun gold with a deeper blush of brown in it, her eyes green-blue as the sea at Capri. Someone's

The Children's Ward

lovely little daughter ! She smiles as we come up, and ceases to build bricks on her chest with such white hands.

" Sister," she whispers, flirting her sea-green eyes wickedly. " Sister, I do love you. . . ."

The white arms are raised as the sister bends down. The body moves slightly, instinct with affection, urgent with a desire to love and be loved, and the arms go round the sister's neck and the hands play a minute with her hair.

" What a beauty," I say, as we go on. " When she grows up she'll——"

" She'll be a cripple," says the sister quietly. " Spinal."

I look into her calm grey eyes and say nothing.



We enter a ward inhabited by small brownish babies who sleep with their tiny faces screwed up and lips moving. Now and again they make queer indefinite movements, a kind of boneless writhing. I bend over them and smile ; for it always seems so funny that these strange little things can turn into men and women, grow whiskers, and become grandfathers . . . then the sister says one word and I draw back in horror, for this is one of the most ghastly rooms in all London.

" But we call it 'wasting disease,' " she murmurs.

The sins of the fathers and the mothers ! As I look at these poor babies I think that I would not only call them by their real name, but that I would

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also show them to all young men and women. This is a black sin. A man's life is his own to make or break, but this stream of other lives, tainted at the source of life, handicapped before birth, and going on and on branded by impurity, is a crime the soul shudders from.

"And science must keep them alive? That seems unfair to them and to the world."

"Thou shalt not kill," says the sister. "Thou shalt not kill!"



In another room jolly little babies of all ages roll and tumble round their cots, pulling themselves up solemnly and subsiding fatly, vaguely annoyed or thrilled by the law of gravity. Babies are of two types: the batter-pudding kind and the little old man kind which enter the world looking like their own grandfathers.

"Curious things happen here," says the sister. "What do you think of this little fellow?"

He is two months old, and resembles the oldest inhabitant. His chin juts out and his nose is large. The only thing he requires is a small blond moustache and a pair of pince-nez and he could then put on a bowler hat and go out into the world. I told the sister that he could get a job anywhere as a collector of rates and taxes. That type. A smart little man.

"Well," she said, "he's a poor little fellow, and he doesn't know the trouble he's caused. He's the exact image of his father, and his father

The Children's Ward

cannot see it. He thinks he looks like someone else. He's separated from his wife because of it."

"But this baby is like a family portrait," I say.

"Of course he is," she replies indignantly. "And if that wretched father came in now you could hardly tell them apart! The fool!"



In a quiet ward a woman sits beside a cot holding the hand of a baby. The child turns and twists in a troubled sleep and whimpers piteously. The woman is poor and her hands are grimed with work.

"That's her seventh child," whispers the sister. "They are to operate in a few minutes. Something wrong inside, and we don't know what it is."

And the woman with seven children sits there a symbol of Motherhood, grieving for this little child of hers as if it were the only one, worn with sacrifice, torn with pity, raw with love.

A doctor comes in, soothing, kind.

"Don't worry. It will be all right. Really. Trust us."

He beckons to the nurses, and the woman kneels down and buries her tired face in the bright hair on the pillow.



How unconscious are the London crowds outside of all this so near to them, always with them; this tall building ploughing its way through suffering like a splendid ship at sea.

Two in a Tower



TWO men sit in a tall white tower at Croydon Aerodrome with earphones strapped to their heads. When they are not speaking on a wireless wave, receiving telegrams, writing figures in ledgers, or poring over maps, they can look out of the windows and watch the big Paris air liners swoop out of the sky. Behind the landing ground the green Surrey fields rise to a ridge on which, far off, the Crystal Palace holds two giant candlesticks in the air.

This is the Control Tower of London's Air Port. It is the ear, eye, and voice of the aerodrome. There is nothing else like it in the country. Pilots above the clouds in the Channel pour their troubles into the ears behind the headphones, and voices from this white tower go out into the sky, soothing the worries of airmen in bad weather, helping them, leading them home. On a cork table is painted a map of Europe. One of the men is always busy sticking little coloured flags on the map.

"Look!" he says. "These are the aeroplanes now flying. This Goliath has just passed that Handley Page over Hythe. That flag in mid-Channel is a French machine coming over with a cargo of silk stockings. This blue flag is the Cologne 'plane. . . ."

"Passed Lympne!" whispers the man next

Two in a Tower

to him, and the aeroplane-spotter picks up a little flag and takes it out of Kent into the sea.



I pick up a headphone and strap it on. Nothing happens. Everybody, it seems, is very happy in the sky. There is no fog, there is no wind, there are no complaints. Then, suddenly :

"Hallo, Croydon?" cries a cheery voice. "Hallo? A passenger in my machine is very troubled."

"That's the Cologne pilot speaking from the Channel," whispers one of the control men.

"He's very troubled," says the pilot, "because he's left his passport with you at the aerodrome. Now, can you send it on at once to the Dom Hotel at Cologne? You can? I'll tell him. Thank you!"

Before the man driving the Cologne air-liner cuts off I think I heard him sing a cheerful little song away up there in the sky above the Channel, but I cannot be sure!



One of the clerks writes out a note about the passport, and a messenger climbs down the perpendicular ladder with it and goes off among the old army huts below to deliver it.

I look round the control tower, admire the hundred gadgets it contains, admire the map with two pieces of string hanging to it, which is one

The Spell of London

way of finding a lost 'plane. (I wish I could explain why.) Then one of the control men turns a switch and hundreds of red lights spring out, deep ruby in the sunlight, crowning the tops of huts. He turns another switch and ground lights come to life. I realize how thrilling this tower must be on a dark, stormy night of winter with a weary, cold pilot buffeting about in the sky and the rain lashing the windows, and a plaintive voice coming down, out of the clouds, asking for light—and more light—and news of the wind down below. . . .



The telephone bell rings. The restless traffic controller of the Imperial Airways is on the other end of the wire. He is a man who counts his 'planes more carefully than a hen mothers her chickens. If one lags behind he gets nervy and wants to know all about it.

"What's happened to the cargo machine that left Zurich this morning?"

"Signalled Lympne half an hour ago," is the quick reply.

"Thanks, she'll be in to time."

A man with a pair of field glasses moves round on the outside platform and says something that sounds positively nautical. I look out and see far over the Surrey hills a dot in the sky. He has spotted the Paris 'plane. The men write in their books. She is up to time!

In a few minutes she comes roaring over our

Two in a Tower

heads, making a wide circle, going off, it seems, to the Crystal Palace ; then she turns, skims back over the aerodrome roofs, and comes to earth, her fat-tyred wheels churning up the dust from the grass. She is big and brown, and along her body runs a strip of plate glass, through which I can see a row of excited faces, a girl's pink hat, a man in a tweed cap. . . .

She taxis to her landing place. The mechanics run to her. The pilot heaves himself up in his seat, raises his goggles, and steps out in a belted leather coat, groping for a cigarette. Men run up with steps. A young man comes out of the aeroplane with a camera, the girl in the pink hat appears and stands smiling in the doorway as he takes a snapshot of her. Then she steps delicately out upon the earth.

She does not notice the tall white tower that brings liners home through the sky, and the tall white tower does not notice her, for—it is chatting with a pilot half-way to Holland !

The Boy in the Dark

HE was only a little fellow and he was tired. Every now and then he would rub his sleeve against his eyes and yawn. It was dark. It was also cold, and he had no coat. The London traffic thundered at intervals past him along the street, but he took no notice of the waxing moons that are headlights or the splendid scarlet omnibuses charging out of the distance into the distance. He was leaning his thin body against the open door of a public bar, gazing through it into that warm yellow cheerfulness in which his parents were putting away considerable quantities of beer.

Now and then he would forget that for legal reasons he had been told to "keep outside." His feet would stray quite naturally from the dark into the light, a yard or so only; and he was over that threshold, his pale, tired face watching—a poor little creature capable of getting everybody into a most awful row with any passing policeman.

At such moments his mother would put down her glass with a "drat that child" thump, and would dart to him and take his thin little shoulder in her convivial hand, saying:

The Boy in the Dark

"Now go on, Alf, keep outside, can't you? Outside, you understand!"

Unquestionably Alf went back outside, a frail black silhouette that no one noticed; back to lean against that door, to be jostled by people going in and people coming out, to rub his hand across his seedy-feeling eyes, but not (so marvellously do children accept circumstances) to wonder for one second why on earth he had been born to stand outside an unpleasant place that makes parents either hit or kiss one another.

Poor Alf.



I felt sorry for Alf.

I remembered that when you are as small as he things have a way of etching themselves on your brain in fine, deep lines. Grown-up people think you do not notice things; but you do. Nothing escapes you. Grown-up people think you are a child, whereas to yourself you are just as mature as they are, only in a different kind of way. They are big and strong and incomprehensible; you are small and weak and clear-minded. Your world is much more logical than theirs; at times they seem quite insane, they do such silly things.

All you can do is to remember and think and worry and wonder . . . wonder. . . .



The Spell of London

A thin woman left a perambulator outside the public-house as she went inside to "have one."

Alf stole over to it and looked inside at a fat baby deep in sleep. In this baby's hand was a paper bag which evidently held sweets. The sight appeared to revive Alf slightly. He looked round. He looked inside the bar. He looked up and down the street. Then he put forth a hand and took the bag. He took a sweet and replaced the bag carefully. The sweet bulged in his cheek. Then it did not bulge. Alf looked towards the innocent child, his morality quite snapped. He stole up again and took two, then he felt it was a pity to do a thing by halves—he took the last and put back the bag!

I forgot my omnibus as I watched him.

I wondered whether he was conscious of any moral lapse or whether it had seemed to him the only right and proper thing to do. I felt that if at Alf's age I had spent many evenings waiting in the street outside a public-house I would probably have done exactly the same thing; and who would be to blame?

The thin woman came out looking stronger and removed the scene of the crime. Alf exhibited no outward signs of relief as the perambulator with its comatose victim departed into the dark. . . .



Mr. and Mrs. Alf came out of the bar in a jocose mood. They lingered with an acquaintance. "That your little boy?" asked the acquaintance.

The Boy in the Dark

"That's the nipper," remarked Mr. Alf proudly.

"He's a good, quiet little chap," said the acquaintance. "Why, my Bert hardly gives you time to 'ave a quick one, he's that restless."

"Alf's a good boy," said his father heavily, giving the little pale face a playful slap. "Ain't you, Alf . . . a good boy," he repeated reflectively.

Alf did not deny this. He just looked up with that little peaky face at these grown-ups who were letting him grow like a weed in a garden. Then they all went homeward.

Poor Alf. . . .

One Minute to New York o o o

IT is 4.30 in the afternoon, that sluggish time when the City of London, the bulk of its work done, begins to think of tea-cake.

In a large building near London Wall a well-lit room that knows no tea-time, no luncheon interval, no dinner-time, no Sunday or Bank Holiday is just getting into its stride. A steady clacking of typewriter keys, staccato drumming from queer electric instruments, the plopping of leather cylinders falling from pneumatic tubes into wire cages compose the metallic medley that never ceases day or night. Over seventy men and women sit at desks, ranked row on row, bent and intent; for they are serving the great Atlantic cable that for three thousand two hundred miles lies like a swollen serpent on the bed of the ocean, while messages of wealth and ruin, of hope and despair, of friendly greeting and commercial agreement flash along the mysterious length of it. The room is the receiving and transmitting office of the Western Union Cable Company.

Now see one of the most marvellous things in London!

A young man sits at a desk watching a little inch-wide strip of paper run from a complicated looking box over a metal strip. An uncanny little metal pointer, one end vibrating in a tiny pool of green ink, the other moving rapidly over

One Minute to New York

the paper, traces a queer endless pattern on the strip, rather like a fever patient's temperature chart.

As the young man watches the niggling pattern his brain is busy translating it into words, and his hands—which often tap out seventy words a minute—put down the words on a typewriter. He is receiving a message from New York. That steady motion of the metal pointer, as of an invisible hand using a stylographic pen, is the work of a man three thousand two hundred miles away in the United States! There is no interval in time. The very second the man in New York taps his keys the pointer in London traces its green message, and the other man at this end of the sea serpent bangs it out on a typewriter. Most of New York's remarks seem to read like this:

VZONFGTY MKJHNBGR LOKMNZZDR
HGTRDFGTERR.

I suppose somebody understands!

* *

Down one side of the room are the desks of the banks, the big commercial companies, and trusts. They are chattering away to New York like starlings. It is 4.30 p.m. or 11.30 a.m. in America. While London is tired and tea-timeish fresh young America with its coat off, the juice of the morning grape fruit still upon its lips, the first bootleg cocktail a good hour and a half off, is receiving the result of London's day's work.

The Spell of London

Suddenly a whole colony of machines sing a chorus. Something has happened on Wall Street! How they chirp and chirrup and then stop. How temperamental this room is; how sensitive to the swift neuritis of finance! Listen! Clatter, clatter, clatter! Someone, perhaps, is a millionaire; someone else broke! Instantaneously the little machines blurt it out like a lot of women at a tea fight, singing their eternal song of pounds and dollars. Then the London machines join in as our Stock Exchange replies. . . .

Once at school I saw a doped frog's heart beating: a little red pumping thing. Here in this room I seem to see the heart of finance beating, pumping out its daily nourishment to the million arteries and veins.



I watch a girl with shingled hair send a message to New York as easily as if she were playing a foxtrot on a pianola. It is timed 4.34. She sends it. It is at once in New York. The clock stands at 4.35! One minute to cross the Atlantic! She takes up an electrically-regulated time punch, stamps it, flings it in a basket, and—goes on flashing things over the Atlantic.

I have a vision of millions of Babbits chewing their cigars, tearing open envelopes, profiting by their contents, buying, selling, losing, gaining, putting on coats, and taking chorus girls out to lobsters, while all the time throughout their day (part of which is our night) the little

One Minute to New York

spitfire machines snap their fingers in Wall Street.



How typical of civilization ! Each age piles up its marvels and becomes dependent on them. Where was all this fifty years ago ? What consternation would fall to-day in the City of London if this room were blotted out ! Yesterday's miracles are to-day's platitudes, yet much more : they are to-day's necessities. Imperceptibly life changes, is readjusted because of them. How many London businesses would smash if it still took three weeks to reach New York ?

"And this is not the end," says an official. "There's no doubt that some day soon we shall be speaking to the States. We are always improving, speeding up. Look at that !"

In a corner I see a typewriter working away furiously with a kind of devilish deliberation, and—no human hand over the keyboard ! It is comic in its efficiency, in its air of I-don't-make-any-mistakes ; in its solemn self-satisfaction.

"Who," I ask, "is working that ?"

"A man in our Amsterdam office !"



As I leave the room there is an outburst from New York ; a sharp fusillade in reply from London. I go out thrilled by the human brain, wondering if it will lead to the stars and the moon, or whether it will all end with a strange, savage man picking

The Spell of London

up a telephone insulator from a lonely ruin and wondering dully what it is, thinking that perhaps it might make rather a wonderful pendant on his wife's necklace of chipped glass.

On a Sunday

EVERY Saturday Gladys covers her typewriter, pats her hair, pulls her hat over her ears, and abandons the City of London to cats and caretakers.

What a gloomy, lonely spot it is on Sunday ! Leave the main omnibus routes, on which there is a thin trickle of traffic, and you plunge into street after street, lane winding into lane, empty, lifeless. Can this be the same City of week-day drive and thrust, of charging wheels and urgent feet ? Life has gone from it as completely as a tide goes out to sea. Look ! In that little road, famous for five hundred years as one of London's thronged streets of commerce, there is nothing but a grey pigeon nodding quickly as it picks up oats dropped from the nose-bag of a carter's horse on Saturday morning !

Desolate London ! On each side of the narrow road the tall warehouses gaze blankly at one another. It is almost a city of the dead. Not quite : it has a strong " back-on-Monday " look about it ! There is a vigorous promise of return over the locked warehouses and offices.

The last act of Phyllis before she went home on Saturday was to pin a big sheet of brown paper over the hats in the showroom window ; and surely that is Mr. Jones's alpaca coat hanging up there behind the closed door ; and note how neatly Mr. Robinson placed his big cloth scissors

The Spell of London

beside a pile of serge on the counter which you can see quite plainly from the road !



The next street is the same, and the next, save for a big ginger cat enjoying the rare experience of sitting on the kerbstone.

"Hullo, cat!" you say, quite glad to have found something alive in the City of London.

She blinks her amber eyes at you once or twice, and looks away, as if occupied with higher thoughts.

"Thinking about Confucius?" you ask, and she blinks again, and says as plainly as a cat can look such things: "Go away and don't spoil the only peace this City ever enjoys!"

"Nice cat . . ." you begin, but she casts a look of hate at you and, rising slowly, walks wearily away.

Down the street you go, thinking how different it looks without the crowds that on week-days fill it to the brim. Some merchants have emptied their windows as at the menace of an invasion; others have left them as they were on Saturday—a kind thought, for it gives the City police something to look at during their lonely walks.

One is looking now. He is standing solemnly regarding silk stockings on cardboard ankles.



In another deserted street you surprise three cats sitting together looking up at something. They slink off with a guilty air as you advance.

On a Sunday

You wonder what they were watching. You see a milk-can hung well out of their reach on a door handle. Strange! Does the milkman still go jangling through the City of London? The door opens. A man who is in the early stages of dressing comes out in carpet slippers and a cap, takes a look up and down the street, unhitches the milk can and prepares to retire.

"Do you live here?"

"Yes," he says grudgingly, really meaning, "What's it got to do with you?"

"How many miles do you have to walk for a pint?"

He smiles. You have hit his great grievance! He becomes human and tells you a few of the sorrows of a caretaker's life. "Yes; it's lonely living in the City of London, and you can't leave a bit of food in this particular house because of the rats, and if you were to let the milkman put the can down on the step there wouldn't be a drop left, and the places where you can get a drink on week-days are shut on Sundays. . . . Still, it's quiet, and for them that like a bit of peace living in the City isn't too bad.

"And there's always plenty of churches for the wimmen. . . . I was just lookin' for my missus when you came along, sir; regular church-goer, she is. Good morning, sir. Ah, get away with you, you great big sandy thief. . . . That's the one, sir, that ginger cat! Some day he'll bring a ladder with him. . . ."



The Spell of London

The church stands at the end of the street. A tall sycamore leans from the few square feet of churchyard left, a lovely, colourful thing, in this greyness of stone. It is one of the old churches that Wren rebuilt after the Fire of London. You go inside ; it is half full of men and women, but mainly women. The voice of the clergyman drones on and on, the sunlight slants through the stained-glass windows. Here the life of the old City of London is continued. This has not changed !

You go out again down more silent thoroughfares till at St. Paul's a flood of life meets you, and the omnibuses come charging up Ludgate Hill almost as though it were Monday !

Just a Song

YOU can wander London for twenty days speculating on the motives which sway men and women ; on things that go on in the brain behind the mask, never knowing for certain, just guessing ; but on the twenty-first day a little deed, a stray word will swiftly illuminate the mystery of another life ; and you will know. . . .

He sat on a wooden box outside one of those ramshackle eating-houses round Covent Garden. A huge cup of coffee was on his knee, and in his great, grimy hands was a slice of ham hidden between two paving-stones of bread. He was a tough fellow with a blue chin. His greasy cap, pulled down over his eyes, did not enhance the charm of a face like that of a battered bulldog. His figure was that of a heavy-weight champion who is getting heavier.

Round his feet were tomatoes that had fallen by the wayside, also fragments of cabbage and the tissue wrappings of oranges.

A few feet away on the edge of the kerb stood a young man with a high crop of brittle hair, who, holding a cap to his breast, opened his mouth in a song which even the adjacent barrel organ could not entirely suppress. The big hulk sitting on the

The Spell of London

box was his only audience, and it was obvious that the audience hated to be sung at. When the big man was not glaring murderously at a punctured tomato he was glaring at the vocalist, as if at any moment he might spring up and convert him into a punctured tomato.

The songster appeared blissfully unconscious that he was standing on the edge of death. . . .

I per-hassed by your whi-hindow
When the mo-horning was red . . .

—declared the young man; while the other regarded him with a baleful eye that suggested that if only he had been aware of this he might have sat up for the singer with a gun.

* * * *

I wanted to see how things would end, for the audience was becoming restive. I lingered at the shop next door.

In the spri-hing I bring you vi'lets . . .

—began the tenor sentimentally. The other lifted his eyes slowly. He looked as though his contribution to the autumn would be the thickest ear in London. Then he brought from his pocket a bottle and poured neat brandy, I think, into his cup and drank it at a gulp. He began to look at the singer meditatively, critically, almost with interest, as a man chooses a target. His eyes were

Just a Song

slightly red, and I realized that he was not quite sober. This had the makings of a real murder.

All the time sentiment flowed from the harsh throat of the unsuspecting youth.



Song followed song generously, till at last the singer looked up to the sky and began what I instinctively knew was his *tour de force*. It suited his unfortunate voice :

Ten dirty little fingers,
Two dirty little hands,
Ten dirty little fingers
That have broken all commands.
What would she do without them ?
A mother understands. . . .
Bless his little heart and soul,
And dirty little hands. . .

Now it was coming . . . now . . . ! The big man rose with a livid face. I cannot report his remarks. Among other things he told the songster to shut his regrettable mouth and go to a place where it is too hot to sing. He stood over the thin youth like a mountain, with his arm raised. Then he crumpled . . . he was certainly not sober . . . and fumbling in his pockets took out a coin and gave it to the young man. That, I thought, was exceedingly strange, even though he were drunk. He lurched away and came into slight conflict with the kerb. . . .

A girl who had come out of the shop said to another girl :

The Spell of London

"He's still on the drink, poor feller!"

Why "poor feller"? He was a great drunken bully! I asked them why.

"Well, you see," said one, "he lost his little boy last week . . . run over by a van. He was only five, and ever such a dear little chap!"



I went on over the littered pavements, and that voice seemed to fill the heaven:

Bless his little heart and soul,
And—dirty little hands!

Mayfair's Cottage

EXACTLY three hundred and seven years ago there was a cottage in Mayfair : and nothing else : no lords, no ladies, no rich Jews, no gouty old men in arm-chairs ; and not one solitary butler.

And in this cottage, which was Mayfair's only mansion, lived a shepherd, who used to look after the cattle during the annual fair in May. When he was not doing this he had time to look out over the wilderness of Hyde Park towards Kensington, where there were robbers and highwaymen, and, in another direction, he could see, across green fields and hedges, Charing Cross, an upstart village, and, beyond, the hill of Lud, on which the great City of London sprawled and smoked on quiet evenings. If Mr. Shepherd, Mayfair's one inhabitant, wanted a new pair of trousers (which probably never happened), he had to tramp miles to London to buy a pair, and when he reached home again he no doubt sighed, and picked a few blackberries in Park Lane and said to his wife : " That be a wicked city, wife, and it's good to be back in the country ! "



The fields have gone, the blackberries have gone, everything that made Mayfair nice and restful has gone, but, miracle of miracles and marvel of

The Spell of London

London, that shepherd's cottage still remains ! I found it in Little Stanhope Street. It is squeezed in behind Park Lane and a huddle of mews and garages. "The Cottage, 1618 A.D." is written over an oak postern gate, from which hangs a brass lantern. I opened the gate and went in.

I was in a tiny garden. A jackdaw in a wicker-work cage with an open door sat with a cheerful expression on a perch. Small blue countrified flowers grew in a border. Ivy hung from the walls of the cottage. I was as surprised as the boy in H. G. Wells' story who opened a green door in a wall and encountered the garden of the Hesperides, where golden apples hung from trees and girls played with leopards on the grass. This Mayfair ! Incredible !

A tall, blue-eyed man came out of the shepherd's cottage. He was Brig.-General R. S. Stronach, who owns thousands of acres of Sutherlandshire and the most romantic little town house in London. We went over and talked to the jackdaw.

"Yes, he flies about," said the general. "But he never goes far. His only adventure was when he flew into Lord Curzon's bedroom round the corner and perched on the bedpost. Lord Curzon looked up rather surprised and John looked at him, and they made friends. When I went round to bring John home Lord Curzon wanted to keep him. By Jove, he did !"

* * * *

Inside, the shepherd's cottage looks like every

Mayfair's Cottage

good American's dream of heaven : soft light on old oak, intelligent furniture, good pictures, gleam of old brass and pale shine of pewter.

" This," said General Stronach, " used to be a blacksmith's forge."

It is now the most picturesque dining-room in London ; a beamed roof with tool marks in the wood, a great red-brick hearth, a flagged floor, a long refectory table, a grandfather clock, tapestry, and mellow family portraits.

" Can you hear London ? " asked the general.

" No. I can hear only the year 1618 A.D., as promised on the gate outside."

" It may surprise you to know that I can remember horses being shod in this room. I didn't mind that ; but when they began to make tin pans I decided to add this forge to the cottage."



We went out into the small flagged garden. It was just as though some magician had picked up an old country cottage and had dropped it into the heart of London. We talked about Shepherd's Market, which lies at the back of the house. On the other side of it once ran the brook from which Brook Street takes its name.

The wind rustled the ivy. John put his head out of his cage and made a vague remark. I felt as though a ghost had risen up out of the London soil saying " This is what Mayfair was like once before grandeur went to its head. . . ."

I had the fancy that perhaps when the general

The Spell of London

goes away to Scotland to kill salmon the ghost of Mr. Shepherd, the pioneer of Mayfair, comes on moonlight nights to lean on his crook and wander contentedly round the house to which Time has been so kind. Why not? Perhaps if there is any shortage of butlers in the immediate neighbourhood it may be due to the fact that during those rare evening moments when a butler is not butling, a white flock of sheep have been seen coming slowly up Little Stanhope Street to fade as in a mist towards the queer little postern gate in the corner.

"Well, there's nothing like it in London," said the general.

"There is not."

"There is not," repeated Lord Curzon's friend, with a wise shake of his little black head.

I went out through the little postern gate, where a man said, "Taxi, sir?" and a Rolls-Royce glided round the corner containing the large, exotic apple of some Hebraic eye.

The Engine Driver o o o o

8 P.M.

In ten minutes the very ordinary man leaning far out of the engine cab will see the flutter of a green flag. He will turn swiftly to the gauges and levers above the roaring furnace ; there will be a gusty burst from the low smoke stack ; and the giant locomotive with its chain of coaches will glide smoothly from the gloom of a London terminus towards the other end of England.

Such a powerful poem in steel. The oil gleams green on its axles, the long body, built for eighty miles an hour, seems to crouch over the metals in sheer concentrated strength like an heraldic beast, swift and lean in line as a panther, strong and masculine as a shire stallion. It sways through the outer suburbs and roars out into open country, where little hares sit up in the corn and lollop away in alarm from the scream of this sudden, unaccountable monster that eats up miles as a scythe eats grass. Darkness finds it still thundering through tunnels, thudding with a rattle as of musketry over river bridges, flinging the length of its yellow tail across the night like an earthbound meteor.

And the very ordinary man, now black with grime and sweat, gazes with narrowed eyes over the track, the lives of four hundred men and women in his soiled hands, and his eyes looking for the

The Spell of London

calm green lights against the sky which beckon him on and wink in a flash as he goes by to the song of his thunderous wheels :

Bring 'em home, bring 'em home,
Don't be late, don't be late.
Clear the road for the night express. . . .

* * * *

In the body of this flying thing Romance, Comedy, and Pathos have corner seats. Wherever there are men and women are these three.

I suppose every one of us has some time in his life played each part in a train, setting out on a romantic journey, on a silly journey, on a pathetic journey. No one has ever guessed. We sat huddled in our corner locked away from observation, masked with our human faces, cloaked by human words designed to say the things furthest from the heart. We might be on the way to the turning-point in our life with the same expression that we should assume on the way to Broadstairs for the weekend. Only when we are nearly dead (or on our honeymoons) do we unconsciously give ourselves away in a train !

Have you ever dipped a net into a pond to draw it up teeming with life which you have dumped in another place ? A train is like that : a netful of human emotion in transit. Each life temporarily dominated by an intention, each person animated by some definite desire, to get somewhere, to see someone. . . .

The Engine Driver

That young man in the corner ! Is he aching with every revolution of the wheels because SHE is at the other end of the journey and Time has become an elastic band pulled out by two giants ? (Or is he going to Bradford to sell collar studs ?) Down the corridor in an empty first-class carriage are two honeymooners. He has shaken himself like a dog and has carefully picked up each tiny crescent of confetti and hidden it under the mat. She is thinking of home, and the wheels sing to her :

You've done it now, you've done it now ;
He's rather a dear, but you've done it now. . . .

The train rockets into the darkness ; and they kiss.



There are placid people, dull people and interesting people. You look at them wishing that their heads were transparent so that you could see inside and discover the motives working them, pulling them over a thousand miles from one place to another. Now and then you hear without asking :

" My daughter's going to have her first baby, and so I'm going to be with her. . . . "

" I hear it's very bracing. My doctor told me that I really ought to go to Switzerland, but I can't afford it. . . . "

" I haven't seen him for ten years. His ship comes in to-morrow. . . . "

The Spell of London

Little flashes like that, rare but illuminating.

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Wait till the journey's end. Then, and only then, do the puzzles work out :

" My dear, I don't want to alarm you, but she's terribly ill. In fact. . . ."

" You mean—I'm too late ? "

" Yes."

Just that. Or this: a girl waiting on the platform and a young man trampling on porters and passengers as he forges his way to her, his eyes seeing only her.

" I thought I'd never get here ! Didn't sleep a wink all night ! You *do* look lovely. . . ."

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So they split up and merge themselves in the life of another town, but few, as they pass, look up at the ordinary face in the engine-cab, so black with coal and sweat, or at those large, grimed hands which held their lives through the swift thunder of the night.

Ham and History



EVERY day people go to see the historic frescoes in the Royal Exchange hard by the Bank. How many, I wonder, notice the much more interesting dado of faces below the frescoes !

Young, lanky boys working near the Bank, too poor or too careful to spend money on luncheon, go to the Royal Exchange from noon till one to occupy the wooden benches and bring out from their pockets bulky brown paper bags. The sandwiches which mother, or the landlady, cut at 8 a.m. are there consumed, so that soon, whichever way you look, you see bulging cheeks and rhythmically working jaws.

Round the Royal Exchange walks the grey-haired Elizabethan constable in his watchman's dress—green caped coat, gold braided hat and stick—a venerable official, who by virtue of ancient custom has the right to arrest evildoers within the City's walls. But I think he would always tell a policeman.

"Yes," he says, drawing a hand down a silver beard. "Yes, they make a terrible mess with their apple cores and their monkey nuts, their silver paper and their brown paper bags ; but it's nice for them to have this quiet place to eat in, isn't it ? Boys just starting work in the City, you know."



The Spell of London

Now London does things just as a matter of course which make you proud of London. In Berlin, or any city not so sure of itself as London, poor, grubby little boys, red at the wrist and with no money, would not be allowed to seek sanctuary in one of the most historic buildings in the City ; a building which, although it now has outgrown its purpose, did in its day help to lay the foundations of commercial London.

When great Sir Thomas Gresham gave London her first Royal Exchange in the reign of Elizabeth, the court—still paved with the Turkish hone stone of the first building—was crowded not with little boys and humble clerks, but with the merchant princes of Tudor London.

On these stones was unfolded that chapter in London history more thrilling than any fiction of the Spanish Main, when the merchant adventurers of London, their minds dazzled with the romance of a widened world, formed companies to sweep the seven seas and bring the riches of the earth to London Town. The South Sea Company, the Guinea Company, the Royal Africa Company, the Turkey Company, the Canary Company, and many more—only one of which remains, the Hudson's Bay Company—began the greatest trade boom England had known.

In this Royal Exchange was the first common meeting-place the merchants had enjoyed, the first Bourse ; the telegraph office before the telegraph was invented, the Fleet Street before there was a daily page of City news. It pulled commercial London together, gave her that unity

Ham and History

which enabled her to profit by the Netherlands wars and knock out Antwerp as the centre of commercial Europe.

How much talk there must have been of the new sea route to India, of the amazing Americans, of the new colony of Virginia, of the mysterious white lands of the north not yet known as Canada, as these great soldier-merchants sent fleet after fleet of London sails slanting over the seas of the world. . . .



And the Royal Exchange, having done its work well and truly, sits in the heart of London with the traffic on all sides, the telephones in every office, the little messages ticking themselves instantly under the Atlantic into Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia. Throughout the air go messages that link continent to continent, hemisphere to hemisphere. . . .

When you pass by the Bank, look up at Gresham's grasshopper on the campanile of the grey old mother of London trade, and remember that while she stands there full of past glory she is not too proud to open her arms to that character very dear to London: the young boy just beginning his career in the City. . . .

Munch-munch go their jaws from twelve till one. On each knee is a folded magazine . . . a tale of pirates and dead men's gold. They do not hear the thunder of the wheels, the sound of life outside; for in their ears is, I think, the sound of wind in a

The Spell of London

sail, the ring of a grappling iron, the hoarse cries of a boarding party.

They go out, full of fiction and ham, unconscious that the greatest story of all was in the stones beneath their feet.

The Mild Giants ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

EVERY morning they come straining with a great clatter of hoofs over Blackfriars Bridge, pulling a lorry piled high with boxes. One is a big bay with a white blaze; the other is a big black with a star on his forehead.

Above, among the boxes, sits a little wispy creature with a greasy cap over one eye, a stumpy pipe sprouts from the ragged moustache which covers a weak mouth.

He is the master: the triumphant declaration of the power of mind over matter. Like most London carters he is a good master, a kind and considerate master. Between him and his two mild giants exists complete understanding; a mutual confidence, built up in years. He knows them; they know him.

If you or I were to drive this lorry over Blackfriars Bridge on a crowded morning when there is not more than half an inch between wheels and a policeman's notebook, our inexperience would communicate itself by way of something more subtle than the reins, and we would end up the centre of a crowd.

* * * *

They pull up over Blackfriars Bridge, harness jingling, great bodies steaming, and go slowly

The Spell of London

along New Bridge Street to a warehouse in a narrow lane off Farringdon Street, where the master backs the lorry against the kerbstone so that his two giants may relax. As he clambers down from his pyramid two mild faces turn, one with a white blaze, one with a white star, both inexpressibly mild and patient. A great hairy hoof paws the pavement impatiently.

"Aw' right, aw' right ; don't get the wind up ! " says the master. " I'm a-comin'."

He walks round with two nose-bags half full of oats. The great heads nozzle him, the huge forelocks wave as the heads move, and the velvet-soft dewlaps twitch in eager anticipation.

He straps on the feed-bags, and the two mild giants of every London morning stand peaceful, eating. If it were possible to put a finger on the happiest moment of such dull lives, no doubt this would be the time. They eat till the oats diminish and the bag has to be flung high in the air. . . .

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The dog offers man friendship ; the horse unquestioning service.

These lumbering giants of the London streets are painfully beautiful in their complete subservience. They are not pathetic, because they have no self-pity ; they have never known anything but labour.

There may have been a day when, as long-limbed colts, they ran over green fields, but the

The Mild Giants

memory has surely been obliterated by their fate as beasts of burden.

All day long they stand relaxed against the kerb hardly moving for hours, standing in that dull, ordained servitude with their great heads drooping, the sweat dried black on their bodies, waiting, waiting, waiting as hour succeeds hour for that moment when the master will mount and the reins tighten, telling them once more to strain against the weight.

Such willing servants.

There is, to me, no lovelier sight in London than a rough carter making much of his horses; no sight more worthy of punishment than the brute who swears at them and jags their mouths. But this is rarely seen. If you keep your eyes open in the narrow lanes of the City you will on most days in the week interrupt a conversation between a carter and his giants:

“Go on with you, you blinkin’ old flat-footed good-for-nothin’ . . .”

The big head noses the master’s greasy waistcoat! Something of the affection in this familiarity finds its way into the patient head. A dumb animal sometimes looks at a man in a way which should, no matter what that man has done in his life, provide him with a passport to heaven.



The afternoon wanes, the last box is unloaded.

“Gee-up!” says the master.

The two mild giants settle into their collars and

The Spell of London

go out into the gathering dusk of the streets, over the bridge to stables. A night; and then tomorrow the same early dawn, the same load, the same servitude. . . .

As I see them go, heavy, patient, clumsy, yet in some way magnificent and grand, I hope that a large tract of paradise is set apart for them—a green heaven in which no lorry is ever seen.

In the streets of London they have earned the right to some friskiness and a sense of joy—and, perhaps a worse heaven could be devised for the carter who loves his giants than a seat in sunlight from which, with a pipe always packed with excellent shag, he might observe their elephantine gambols over lush green meadows.

The Unseen Wife



WE were together in a smoking carriage. The woman was elaborately unattractive, but her husband was stone blind. He sat in his corner like a bloated idol, his huge hands on his knees, his head and neck rigid, his sightless eyes gazing directly in front of him towards the wife he could not see. They had been married a long time, for their wedding rings were old and sunken in the middle-aged plumpness of their fingers.

"Would you like a cigarette, dearest?" she asked.

"Yes, darling," he replied.

She took his cigarette case from his pocket, tapped the end of the cigarette on the case, put the cigarette in the man's mouth, and lit a match for him. He patted her hand an instant.

"Thank you, dearest," he said.

It is not usual to hear middle-aged people talk like this. I watched them. The woman was oblivious of everything but her idol. His bow tie had been perfectly tied. She had done it. The blind man was scrupulously neat. She, on the other hand, was untidy and tastelessly dressed. I wondered whether she would have dared to wear stockings of biscuit-coloured wool with *suède* shoes if the man could have seen them. Her bottle-green costume was unbrushed, and her hat was old and unbecoming, and her gloves, which were good,

The Spell of London

gave the strange impression that her hands belonged to another and more elegant woman.

"Such fields of golden flowers, darling!" she said, gazing at the sightless eyes.

"In the grass?" he asked.

"I'm sure the sun's too hot for you, my love; let me pull down the blind."

"Thanks, dearest."

After an hour or so their endearments began to get on my nerves. I felt that the carriage was full of pastry. I began to count the various "darlings" and "dearests," wondering if they could pile up two hundred love notes before Ipswich. It cloyed.

The woman looked at her watch and unstrapped a handbag. She brought out two little medicine bottles and a measuring glass, poured out a dose, and, sitting beside the rigid old idol, whispered: "Time for your medicine, sweetheart!" She brushed the cigarette ash which had fallen on his waistcoat, and obediently he swallowed his mixture, then held up his head for her to wipe his mouth. He patted her hand, and her unattractive face positively glowed with devotion, so that I knew instinctively that the poor old idol was her lover, her husband, and her child rolled into one helpless human being.

The woman was happy. Time, which causes most women to gaze anxiously in a mirror, meant nothing to their love. He could not move a step without her. He was helpless, out of the race, as alone with her in the very surge of life as if the sound of the world were the thunder of surf

The Unseen Wife

breaking on the shores of some desolate desert island. On this tragedy had been built a happy married life. I looked at the man's huge frame and wondered what, if any, difference sight would have made to them—sight and the freedom for him to join in life arrogantly, to escape from this sweet solitude of sightlessness. . . .

"Would you give me a match?" said the woman. I gave her one, and she lit another cigarette for her idol. We got into conversation. I wanted to find out the key to their lives. How long had he been blind? I made him tell me without having to ask so intimate a question. He had gone blind just after their honeymoon, fifteen years since!



"Wouldn't you like to change sides, dearest?"

"Dearest" said that he would. She helped the big frame to move over, fussily taking his shoulders and pressing him back in the seat she had vacated.

"That's better, darling!" said the idol.

He smiled towards her voice. Behind those blank eyes was a picture of her fifteen years ago, when he loved her most, a picture of her engraved there during their honeymoon. If all married men could carry this remembrance! I wondered if his sight came back would he know her now before she spoke? I closed my eyes: she certainly had a lovely voice, velvet with affection and joy in service.

I left the train at a little country station. The

The Spell of London

old idol sat bolt upright and rigid. She was feeding him with a ham sandwich . . . an ancient god receiving offerings from a priestess! The train went on, taking with it the happy Man Who Had Not Seen His Wife For Fifteen Years, on, on, on to their lifelong honeymoon. . . .

The Last Farm

THE farm is, quite naturally, one of the few things which to London spell romance, peace, and innocence. If you could run a convincing farm in Trafalgar Square you might make a fortune by letting stockbrokers in at five shillings a time to lean over the pig-styes. (Smocks half a crown per half-hour.)

So when I took the tube to Highgate recently to examine the last farm in the four-mile radius, which was advertised for sale as the site for flats, I realized that I was engaged on a romantic adventure. London's last farm! In its passing I read the whole history of London :

Here herbs did grow,
And flowers sweet,
But now 'tis called
Saint George's Street.

Perhaps somebody centuries ago wandered sentimentally among cowsheds in Pall Mall, and wondered what the world was coming to !

* * * *

"Fitzroy Farm? Never heard of it!" said the taxicab drivers at Highgate. They held a conference, the result of which was that I was taken through this mountainous region to the very edge

The Spell of London

of Ken Wood, where a sloping path led down to a gate on which was written for the warning of vanished cowherds: "Beware of the dog." It was not good grammar. There were two dogs with extremely pink throats. "Good old fellows . . . there . . . there," I said, with the hopeless air of a man blowing a kiss to an earthquake. A woman came out and locked the dogs in the stable, and I was free to examine London's last real farmstead.



Gaunt bars with tarred beams, blistered and patched, stood round a big, cobbled yard. There were cowsheds in which I visualized Tess-like maids sitting on three-legged stools singing. There were stables empty, granaries desolate, and a big gate through which the hay-wains lumbered once with their fragrant loads. Nothing but a derelict ship seems so dead as an empty farm. No thick boots striking the cobbles, no stamping in manger and stall, no creak of wheels, no cluck of hens . . . only two dogs, the last guardians of the last farm, on guard against—London!

I sighed as sentimentally as any stockbroker, and went round the farm buildings into a little fairyland.

"Used to be Lady Southampton's shooting-box over a hundred years ago," said the woman. "At least, so I've heard."

I picked a cluster of red currants and ate them reflectively, looking at a quaint little thatched

The Last Farm

house with eaves like an old hat low down over a head, such a Grimm's fairy tale of a house. It was empty, like everything else. Ivy glistened on it. A line of hollyhocks stood to attention. There was a bed of flowers. Opposite, at the end of a rough lawn, was a pool of water. It was covered with a scum of minute weeds so that its unbroken surface resembled green ice. Trees grew out of it and dipped their boughs into it, to be at once lost to view in the placid green ice. I walked round the old house. It seemed so simple and full of peace and so old, as if it had grown up out of the soil without any help from man, that for one instant I hated London for killing it.

I ate some raspberries, and watched a large bee wearing yellow fur trousers wrestle with a flower, thinking, as I stood there, of the flats to come, of men rushing out to business, of wives, of children, of geysers, of cold mutton, of alarm clocks, of pictures by Watts and Burne Jones and Rossetti, of men who test gas meters, and of plumbers and their mates.

"It's very old," said the woman.

"It's very beautiful," I said.

"Gr-r-r-r," growled the dogs from the stable, as if in me they had most unjustly scented the enemy who had done this thing.



Out of such murder has London been born. . . .

A butterfly flew out of Ken Wood, flickered into the garden, and off into Ken Wood again. I

The Spell of London

heard a motor-horn in the road above ; and was surprised. I admired the sunlight lighting up red and white flowers in a mass. I watched the queer insects skating over the green ice of the pond, the occasional rise of a bubble that told of life below the weed. I looked at a little window hidden in the thatch, and I thought of the eyes that had looked through it into green fields for generation after generation, and how wide they would have grown had they been told that some day London would stretch out its stone fingers and pluck this simplicity as a hand plucks a flower. I was becoming terribly sentimental. . . .

“ That’s your car, sir.”

There was a violent rude honking from the path above. Confound it ! London calling !

I pulled a small white rose from a burdened bush near the porch and placed it in my button-hole.

The next time I go there I expect there will be gramophones. . . .

Scandalous

I WENT over to Bankside when Blackfriars Bridge was a tangle of lorries and carts, to find an old house which I think must have been pulled down years ago. An hour's search led me to a policeman and a man in shirt, trousers, and cap ; and somehow we began to talk about Queen Elizabeth, with the result that I forgot all about the house.

I want you to picture us standing in the early morning in this dingy street, full of the sound of scrap metal being hurled about and boxes being shot into barges. A policeman, a man in shirt and trousers, and myself earnestly discussing the Virgin Queen ! We were standing beside Cardinal's Cap Alley, the site of the infamous Southwark Stews, for centuries the legendary home of vice in London. I would like to describe ancient Bankside, its theatres, its bull baitings, its bear fightings, its pleasure-gardens, and its whited houses with signs painted on them, its thieves' kitchens, its "Clink," but we should never finish ; and it is all in the histories.

The few old houses which have not become warehouses or wharves stand facing the river, as they always did. There is no wall at this part. Over a pile of rusty scrap metal, disused cog wheels and the ugly entrails of dead machines, I looked across the dancing Thames to the piebald

The Spell of London

beauty of London rising high in spire and dome, dominated by the sturdy bulk of St. Paul's. (If ever you wish to paint an unusual picture of St. Paul's or to take a novel photograph, do it from this spot by Cardinal's Cap Alley.)



"I dunno where that house you're wanting can be," said the man in shirt and trousers, scratching his head, "and I've lived here for thirty years and more."

The policeman put his head on one side and tried to look helpful. I glanced along Bankside, thinking that all places in which people have been extremely wicked have a certain lure. Although this haunt of dead gaiety is now a street of wharves, it still has an experienced air: a stray window, a door post here and there, pull you up sharply.

"The house I want has underground tunnels," I said, as a fisherman casts out the ground bait.

"They mostly have," replied the policeman.

"I've got a cellar," said the man in shirt and trousers, "where thousands, millions, are supposed to be hid. The times I've been over that cellar with a hammer, and never a sign of a blinkin' bob!"

We all agreed that it was hard luck, but worth while sticking to. You never know, do you?



Scandalous

"You see this place used to be the Stews . . ." began the man.

"That means houses of ill-fame," explained the policeman, gravely, as if he were reading a charge sheet.

"Yes, awful," replied the man. "The goings on 'ere in the old days was something dreadful. There was a feller called Cardinal Cap, who had a house full o' wimmen just here."

We all looked revolted, and the policeman sniffed and remarked darkly like a Calvinist:

"Well, he would have, wouldn't he?"

I smiled, because the real facts are these: "The Cardinal's Cap" was the name of the most notorious house in the ancient Stews, from which the alley takes its name, and not, as some writers have said from the connexion with the old religious house of St. Mary Overy. The man was right about the house, but there was no Cardinal Cap.

Here it was that Gloriana, most unexpectedly, entered the conversation.



"See these three houses," said the man, "that's where Queen Elizabeth used to bring her young men."

I was profoundly shocked. So was the policeman.

"It's right," said the man dogmatically. "She used to row over the river and land just there, and they'd have dinner in these three houses, which were only one in those days."

The Spell of London

He then described one of Gloriana's visits so vividly that I began to feel that he must have been there. So did the policeman.

"So old Walter Rayley's been there," he said. The man nodded his head.



I was silly enough to spend the afternoon in the Guildhall Library trying to discover if there was any record of Elizabeth's visit to Bankside other than her journey with the French Ambassador on May 26, 1599, to see a baiting of bulls and bears; but no! I think scandalous Bankside, true to its character after all these centuries, had just awakened to take a kick at Henry VIII's daughter to pay him out for shutting up the Stews by Royal proclamation and the sound of trumpet.

It was such an eyewitness's account! Was it garbled history, an old legend, or merely the penalty of having had red hair?

I give it up!

The Girl in a Box o o o o

SHE sits in a little box dressed in black, and no one ever sees her arrive or leave.

She possesses in a marked degree that air of calm superiority assumed by mathematically-minded people. When she looks you in the eye never flatter yourself that in some remote corner of her exact mentality exists a spark of appreciation, for she is thinking automatically "fifteen and ninepence ha'penny from one pound is . . ." Bang! There before you lies four shillings and twopence halfpenny! She is the Girl in the Restaurant Cash Desk. All round her every day flutters the curious life of a London restaurant. It is one of those gold and marble places which flatter while they feed: chop-house prices in the Palace of Versailles. Such perfect psychology!



The girl in the box looks out over an army of moving jaws. A steady trickle of Puccini from the corner, where a shock-headed Slav sways with his violin, helps to increase the noise made by civilized people when they nourish their bodies. Tinkles of glass, plopping of corks, clatter of plates, and the metallic undercurrent of the knives and forks, the whole symphony clouded by tobacco smoke and whipped by a steady accompaniment of

The Spell of London

bass and treble voices trying to go one better than Puccini, is the atmosphere over which she presides like a priestess.

Has she imagination? What does she think as she watches the hungry feed themselves?

Does she, I wonder, ever reflect what a queer thing a restaurant is. Alone among the animals we human beings make a social function of feeding. I can never decide whether it is an upward or a downward step. It is not a pleasant sight. In fact, to the girl in the box the spectacle of hundreds of men and women of all shapes and sizes stoking themselves with fishes and roasted birds and animals must in time become rather repellent. A dog and a cat have greater delicacy. They hate you to watch them eat. The dog slinks off with his bone, and the cat feeds delicately wherever her food is. Do you know why this should be so?

I think the dog was always a pariah. He had to steal his food and get away quickly before someone threw a stone at him. Perhaps that is why to-day he drags his food to a corner of the carpet, although there is no one to interfere or hurt him. The cat, of course, hunted and killed and crouched down and filled herself on the spot.



Men and women, on the other hand, must have developed the restaurant habit in the jungle. The desire to eat together is older than legend. If it were not so, how could we bear to see the beautiful women we love—who, even, occasionally

The Girl in a Box

marry us—lifting beefsteak to their mouths? Had we not lost the horror of this surprising sight in ancient orgies we should surely fly from it in loathing.

* * * *

This, I imagine, does not worry the priestess of the cash desk. What interests her is the personal drama. Sometimes she betrays her human origin by forgetting to spike a bill and allowing her eye to rove pointedly towards a particular table. What does she see?

A man and a girl. Nothing very unusual you think. He is at his best. His jokes are going down well. She is mooning at him with that you-really-are-the-most-charming-man-I-have-ever-met look in her eyes, and he, intoxicated by his temporary pre-eminence, leans towards her and gazes at her as children sometimes look at cream horns. You have the impression that beneath the table their feet may have flirted, for she goes flicker-flicker with her eyelids, languishes, and eats an olive she did not want.

But the girl in the cash desk seems annoyed. She is siding with an absent woman! She has seen that cream-bun look in the man's eye often, but always directed to a nice girl in grey. She followed the romance, as women do, through its early stages. She guessed that evening he ordered a bottle of Mœt and Chandon that an engagement ring was about to appear, and then, yes; she was right!

* * * *

The Spell of London

No doubt she gloated over them as day by day they steadily consumed bits of cow and sheep, and, of course, she never knew what the row was about. All she saw was the girl in grey pushing a fried sole from her and refusing to eat, and the man gloomily prodding his *entrecôte* and quarrelling with the waiter. Another woman, of course! She'd never trust a man with hair that colour or eyes like that! Many a time he looked at *her* when he should not, but she, of course, pretended not to see.

Now the drama is in its third act: the other woman has turned up! Little cat! Potted complexion, too, and what elbows! She spikes a bill savagely. Will it all come right again? Will the girl in grey ever return? Who knows?

"Seven and tenpence. . . . Two and two change. . . . Good morning."

And the girl in the stage box turns again and watches life.

Behind the Window o o o o

IN that mean London street the small shop stands with a certain air of authority, due to the fact that the world's problems break out like a daily rash on contents boards. "You may telephone from here," says a tin plate over the door.

I went in to telephone. It was a tiny, dark shop that suggested in a melancholy manner that steak and onions had recently passed that way. I rapped on the counter. There was a quick movement across a glass window, through which was revealed a dark sitting-room behind the shop.

A young woman came out smiling. She was exceedingly good looking. Her hair was beautiful, her hands were rough, and her mouth looked as though a hard word would not be possible to her. She was a surprise to me, because it was just the kind of shop in which you expect to find a large man in shirt-sleeves who lost his razor last month.

"There's the telephone box!" said the young woman. Then: "Oh, lor', Mrs. B., fancy seeing you! Alf *will* be glad!"

Mrs. B., who had entered on my heels, was a neat, bleak woman of the kind that harbours an unquenchable enthusiasm for funerals. The young girl departed in excitement. My number was engaged, so I sat down on a chair in the shop and waited.



The Spell of London

"He's coming!" said the young girl, returning.

"How is he?" asked the sorrowful woman.

"Bad," replied Mrs. Alf. "But ever so cheerful. It's wonderful. 'There's millions worse off,' he says, and I suppose he's right!"

"When was he took worse?" asked the visitor.

"Six months gone. After he came out of hospital we thought he was cured, and he got a good job round at Morrisons. Then all of a sudden. . . ."

"You've been a good wife. . . ." began the bleak woman.

"Well, who wouldn't have been?" asked the girl indignantly.

"I don't know so much about that," said the visitor. "There's many a girl promised to marry a boy in 1914 who didn't marry him in 1919 when he came back wounded, you take my word for that."



There was a shuffle from the back room. A young man came slowly into the shop leaning on a stick. His eyes were bright and sunken in his skull. His smile seemed the only live thing about him except a cough. On his waistcoat was the Mons medal. I looked at him and said to myself: "Gas!"

"How are you?" asked the melancholy friend.

"Not so bad," said the man, trying not to cough. "There's millions worse." He smiled. "You must be glad to be alive these days," he added.

Behind the Window

A child came in and bought a pennyworth of red sweets.

"What we should do without the shop I don't know," said the little wife, with a laugh.

"Yes, that's a fact; we're very lucky to have the shop," agreed Alf, smiling.

A fit of coughing seized him suddenly, he waved his hand, and slowly went back into the dark room.

* * * *

"Poor feller," mused Mrs. "Gloom." "You don't have a very gay life, do you?"

Just for a second I caught the passage of something terribly sad across the face of the young woman.

"Sometimes," she said, in a low voice, "when I see girls going past to the pictures-house I feel I'd give anything to put on me hat and go out for a bit, but I daren't leave him alone. 'There's only one thing I'm sorry for,' he says, 'and that's you.' . . . When he talks like that he makes me feel that ashamed I could cry."

"Well, well . . ." said the visitor with a sigh. "Take a plum!" She opened a bag. "Go on, help yourself!"

"Don't think I'm grumbling," said the wife, "because I'm not. If I could go back there's nothing I wouldn't do the same all over again, and that's straight!"

* * * *

"Yes, it's a lovely day, isn't it?" said the little

The Spell of London

wife as I bought a newspaper. " Just like summer again ! "

Through the little window in the wall I saw the hand of her young husband groping along the mantelpiece to find something—the thin, sallow hand of a man of eighty.



" There's millions worse off," I whispered as I went out.

That gallant gentleman in a side street. . . .

The Rotter



“YOU rotter !”

Six schoolboys with their coats off and their white shirt-sleeves rolled above their elbows stood in the Green Park and shouted the shrill taunt. One held a bat, one a ball, and another was putting down the stumps, and all looked in the direction of the Rotter, who was walking slowly away.

The Rotter was small—smaller than any of the six—and his tumbled hair fell in a brown cascade over his forehead. His sturdy legs, with their knobbly, scratched, and not too clean knees, were in wide grey flannel shorts, and he had just put on a little flannel jacket with gilt buttons. Ah, that jacket! One of life’s final gestures. You can temporize and fool people and play with a poker face as long as you like, but there comes a time when, up against it, you make a little final gesture of resignation, and unmake it you cannot—except at the sacrifice of all dignity, all manhood, all self-respect. . . . You put on your jacket, snap your fingers, and walk away. Finish. The boats are burned !

“ You rotter ! ”

Again the taunt came clear over the grass. The Rotter dug his small fists deeper into the pockets of his little grey bags, his mouth sagged and his rounded face, so between baby and boy

The Spell of London

that you could see what he was like in his perambulator, and also guess the kind of youth he will be in ten years' time, looked bitter; and his eyes glowered. He was in that rage of childhood that knows no caution, no reservations, no cunning. He would like to turn back and fight on the grass, fight in a blind, whimpering rage, dig his nails into them, bite their ears . . . But they were so big and powerful, and—there were six of them!

"Ca-ad! You're a ca-ad!" came a sing-song thrust.

The Rotter and Cad stepped sturdily over a small rail to the gravel path, walked round a fat wood-pigeon, and went on towards the lake.



What had happened, I wondered.

Had the Big Six bullied him till he revolted? Had they refused to let him bat or denied him bowling? He may have been in the right or in the wrong. As I followed his small, indignant figure down the path I didn't care; for he had all my sympathy. We have all been the Rotter. We have all at some time put on our jackets and said "It's finished," and we have all flinched at the yelp of the gang coming down the wind.

Trivial, everyday sight, I know!

But, say what you like, this little fellow walking away with dignity, the absurd dignity of the very small, was the essence of all drama:

The Rotter

struggle, man against men, defiance ; a splendid rebel.

* * * *

Something was going on in that tousled head. I could feel it fairly buzzing.

When he judged that he could look round without appearing to exhibit any interest in those others, he turned, left the path, and walked up to a tree, peeping round it towards the scene of his difference. He wanted to know how they were getting on without him ! And what did he see ? Did he find his enemies prostrated with grief, did he see them standing forlorn round the stumps weeping, crying, " Now we've done it, now we've lost him ; won't somebody go and ask him to come back ? " Alas, no ! Poor little Rotter, he saw a game of cricket in hearty progress ; things were as they would have been had he never been born ! This is one of the tragedies of defiance !

Had I seen less clearly into his young heart I might have been one of those well-meaning idiots who go up and ask : " What's the matter, my little man ; what did they do to you ? "

No. Never !

As he turned away from the tree and the sight of that unconcerned group of which so dearly he wanted to make one, something of his defiance left him, and he became not a hero but just a poor little boy with nowhere to go now, no one with whom to play. He walked slowly, aimlessly from one to the other side of the path, and in time I passed him. Two enormous tears were rolling down his

The Spell of London

cheeks, and he was sniffing hard to keep back others.

But I was glad to see that the Rotter's shoulders were set, his hands well down in his pockets, and his feet unwavering in direction: away from compromise or surrender, going on into solitude where there was no bat, no ball, no soft green grass.

Turning of a Leaf

THEY sit in well-bred isolation, turning the pages of old magazines.

Many are old, a few are young; men and women. Outside, beyond the chastely curtained windows, the traffic of Harley Street goes maddeningly past as though there were no illness in the world. A damnably happy butcher's boy perched on a high cart whistles the mutton on its way, a limousine spins shopwards, a brisk, cheery man who has chops for breakfast (and looks as though he sings while he eats them) strides by with his chest out carrying an attaché case. What zest! What a lucky number he has drawn in the lottery of life! Wealth, Fame, and Blood count for nothing on the other side of the window-pane where those others, the prisoners in the Bastille of a specialist's waiting-room, regard the freedom and gaiety of a world peopled by the physically vigorous.



In the high, finely proportioned room the captives of ill-health wait with a show of indifference for that call to the knight of the knife and the medicine bottle.

Such splendid masks! They could be crying like children who have not learnt to hide feeling,

The Spell of London

or they could be discussing symptoms with the freedom of sufferers gathered at a clinic, but instead they preserve their privacy and their dignity and go on reading that "Violet Lady Tooper is playing in the women's finals at Cannes." That queer pain at the heart may be nothing—or everything. They will know soon, perhaps. Meanwhile there is such a thing as a *panache*. The magazine leaves tremble as they are turned. That is the only sign. No; not the only one! The door opens, but before a frozen-looking manservant can murmur a name every eye in the room looks up at him questioningly. A woman rises and goes out. There is no sound but the turning of a leaf. . . .



The sun-brown elderly man in a check suit is a colonel in the Indian Army. He has come half across the world to find out what betrayal his splendid physique has played him in the prime of life. He does not realize that he is reading a fashion magazine, for the fear of ill-health waters the blood of men who have always been strong. When he faces fire across the specialist's desk all that funk will go. He will be slapped reassuringly on the back, no doubt. If not, he is the kind who makes the drama of Harley Street. He will take his medicine and walk out with his chin in the air. No white feathers then.

The young girl with the seeds of disease is there, pale and handicapped, and rather lovely with the

Turning of a Leaf

mark of those doomed to suffer. The man is there to whom this visit and a probable operation means a ghastly hole in a small bank account. But his doctor shook a weary G.P. head at him, and said: "I would rather you saw Sir Quite Blank. He'll tell you right away, and—we might as well know!"

Yes, *she* is there, too, of course, Dolores, Lady of Pains, with all the symptoms of every known and unknown disease. What interest would she have in life if the enthusiastic pursuit of new anxieties deserted her! How carefully she hoards her fears. The frozen-looking manservant tiptoes in. Will her ladyship come? In the sanctum Sir Quite Blank glances at his appointment book, and smiles. Here she is again, that hearty hypochondriac! How the extremes of human nature meet in this room! A man has just left with his death sentence. What balance a man needs to close the door on the sublime and open it on the ridiculous, giving to each the same suave attention!

"Oh, dear Sir Quite, I've just raced back from Nice to see you. That cure, you know. . . . I'm afraid. . . ."

She fixes on the specialist the avid eyes of one whose hobby is illness. She collects mysterious aches as some people collect stamps, rejoicing over a rare specimen. Perhaps subconsciously all that she needs is sympathy.

"She ought to have had two children ten years ago," thinks the specialist as he sends her to Contrexeville. She gushes out and he presses a bell. In the waiting-room the poor care-driven

The Spell of London

man buttons his coat with trembling fingers, and a quick little picture forms in his mind of a wife and children waiting for the verdict.

* * * *

Down Harley Street whistles the butcher's boy. His girl jilted him last week and his employer sacked him yesterday, and he whistles out of a sad heart. Life is a pretty rotten affair. No girl, no job! He stops whistling: it isn't decent. What right has he to whistle? His face shines like a red apple in autumn, his blood courses through his healthy young body.

What a tragedy life is, he thinks!

Simple soul. . . .

New Petticoat Lane o o o o

DO you desire a crowded hour of life on a Sunday morning? Then come with me to London's unknown Petticoat Lane in the West.

We leave behind us the prosperous, stately Holland Park Avenue, Notting Hill, and plunge into roads at the back which have socially declined. They are deserted; sunk in Sabbath calm. But suddenly at Sirdar Road, at Bolton Street, at Crescent Street, we come on a great crowd that packs the roadway tight. This is "Rag Fair," a street market that lasts only for a few hours every Sunday morning, but till the clock strikes twelve the entire district is flung into a violent commercial ecstasy.

You cannot see the stalls for the crowds which press round them. The road is a solid mass of slow-moving men and women. The tenement houses on either side vie with the stallholders in an attempt to make money. On each flight of steps is a pathetic array of worn-out articles, neatly arranged, but so old and useless that it seems to you children must be playing at shop.

Yet this is the work of grown-up men: those torn babies' shoes side by side, those intimate but ragged garments, those battered hats stuck on the railing spikes, those awful pictures of little girls in frilly frocks cuddling huge collie dogs and—essence of commercial optimism—that photograph of some-

The Spell of London

one's grandfather! He stands jauntily beside a bamboo table on which is an aspidistra; and he has a gold Albert and white side-whiskers.

"Fourpence," says the man who is selling his ancestor; then quickly, to your back, "tuppence!"

Can anyone, you wonder, be so alone in this world that they would live with someone's else tuppenny grandfather?

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From time to time householders on the top step take out their clay pipes and thoughtfully arrange old bicycle wheels, vague bits of wood, nails, shoes, and bound copies of the "Sunday at Home," while from upper windows women surrounded by their young gaze down upon the weekly excitement.

Now and then an unshaven and thirsty-looking man dashes down the steps hauling at an ancient perambulator. His wife looks down on him as a dame might have regarded her own true knight as he entered the lists at a tournament, for—if father manages to sell the pram there will be beer in a large jug. . . .

The stallholders harangue the mob, humorously, violently, insultingly, or with a grave attempt at calm superiority. Petticoat Lane in the East is Jewish: this Petticoat Lane of the West is English. Here is rough costermonger wit, an Elizabethan ribaldry and frankness, no Oriental subtlety, no sly cleverness.

"Give the wife a treat once a year," shouts an

New Petticoat Lane

old man standing behind a barrowful of combs. "Give the old girl a treat. . . . Give 'er a comb that won't catch fire and burn 'er blinkin' head off. . . . Look at this. . . . !"

Dramatically he strikes a match and holds it to a celluloid comb. It flares up. He holds the flames to the combs he is selling, and nothing happens. This seems to impress the crowd. With fanatical enthusiasm he quickly grabs six combs of different sizes and yells : "Sixpence !"

There are outstretched hands offering money !

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As you go through the crowd you observe barrows which are really Harrods and Selfridges reduced to the lowest common denominator. They contain a multiple assortment which no man could invent. One stall offers a bottle of pickled onions, a broken stove, an odd satin slipper (left foot), a lithograph of Queen Victoria holding a sceptre, two pairs of combinations, and a set of stags' antlers.

Is anything in the world too old and useless for commerce ? How can there be purchasers for pieces of knotted string, old elastic tape that refuses to be elastic, broken decanters, odd gloves, and Chaplinesque bowler hats ?

"Here is the produce of the cocoa bean," declares a plump little man with a sweetmeat stall. "The pure, unadulterated mixture of sugar with the cocoa bean !"

He carefully tears aside the silver paper from a

The Spell of London

packet and holds it to the crowd as if he was showing them a miracle. (There is always a dramatic moment in street salesmanship : the moment when, after hypnotizing your victim, you drive home a great truth and take his money.)

" If," says the fat man, arriving at this critical moment, " you are this afternoon going to see your dearest friend in life . . . "

Here he holds up the packet of chocolate and gives it an appraising slap.

" If you are going to see this friend you can take with you this packet with absolute impunity."

No one laughs. Before him are rows of stolid faces. A young man pulls himself together and buys a packet, whether or not because he is relieved at the thought of feeding his sweetheart with impunity I cannot say !



A pale woman who carries a pale baby gropes among the debris of a stall. She disentangles something from a grey, dirty decoration in which it is caught up ; a pair of infant's shoes mixed up with that which was once a wreath of orange blossom ! She buys the shoes, poor little tattered second-hand shoes that have already served their purpose. . . .

A few yards away on the main road purr the limousines of Holland Park.

Back Gardens o o o o o

FOR fourpence halfpenny you can have an exciting peep into, roughly, ten thousand lives by buying a ticket at Fenchurch Street and sitting in a train drawn by a keen little elder brother to Stephenson's "Rocket."

I know few things more provoking than the back gardens of London. It seems a rule in certain crowded streets that the front of a house must be as glum as the face of a poker player. You must never be able to tell from the front of a house what is going on inside. But the back of the same house casts off restraint.

The back windows and the back gardens are allowed to tell you almost as much as an old matron who has had ten children will tell you over her third glass of gin.

First of all there are marvellous underclothes. Some districts send their garments to the laundry in secret—no one knows what the person next door wears underneath; in others these facts are blazoned in an almost boastful fashion; and it is always washing day!

Sometimes you see a woman with her mouth full of pegs pinning a sheet to a line, and sometimes you observe a dog that has suddenly gone gay walking across the garden wound up in somebody's shirt; and you hope he won't be found out!



The Spell of London

Then how much character each little strip of garden spells as you go by.

Most are just dreary dumps littered with the debris of ancient enthusiasms: the odd bicycle wheels which Bill found in the rag market and bought first because they were sixpence each and, secondly, because they looked vaguely useful; the wireless contraptions erected with American intentions, and the semi-naval masts put up in who knows what romantic nautical longing?

These masts are, to me, one of the mysteries of the London back gardens. In what fit of sea-sickness have they been erected? They are somehow pathetic. They tower above barren cabbage patches as if some ship has sunk there with all hands. Do their creators derive comfort from them? Do they ever run up dramatic signals on them, or do they just lie in bed (trying hard not to see the gasworks) in an attempt to catch them against the sky, believing them to lean over the green bosom of the deep? I do not know; but I sense an ache here.



In the chaos of crowded buildings offered swiftly to the train you can pick out a yard full of scrap metal. Everything that can fall or ever has fallen from machinery seems to have found a dishonoured grave here. Every kind of cog-wheel lies in rusty confusion with all manner of mechanical entrails whose technical names might baffle an expert.

There are always gloomy men with sacks who

Back Gardens

keep on adding to the loathsome pile, as if behind it all is some restless mind demanding more and more with, perhaps, the eventual intention of mounting to heaven on old tins.

The melancholy pyramids rise to a great height—a cemetery of dead machines ; but over it broods not the peace of a cemetery, but the contempt for past service which is the peculiar horror of all scrapheaps.



Windows.

They flash past, showing things. It is like dipping swiftly into a dozen novels in a library, receiving a hint of a plot here, a sentence there. . . .

Hogarthian women, their sleeves rolled up, eat heartily in one window. It is probably bacon. You wish that you might be invited to share it to find out why they are laughing ; but the train takes you on to little dwelling-rooms turned into horrid, tiny factories in which numbers of women are bent over sewing machines, pedalling away in a desperate race, their pale faces, old and young, close to their work.

This is an unpleasant sight ; they look like captured animals in those small, mean rooms.

Larger factories, with hundreds of young girls in overalls packing something. They wave gaily to the train and laugh.

A man in the next carriage puts his head through the window and waves back from sheer unadulterated gallantry. He can never surely hope to

The Spell of London

meet these girls, yet in a swift moment of romantic enthusiasm he feels compelled to respond. A born serenador, no doubt, a knight born out of his due time, ripe for every kind of errantry and trouble. . . .

Then a face in a window just looking dull and stupid. That is most provoking of all—a dull, listless face in a dull, bleak frame.

Behind it—what? Tragedy? Comedy?

An unknown face with a blank expression—thinking, perhaps, an immortal loyalty; thinking, perhaps, a great hate; thinking, perhaps, that sausages are too dear for breakfast.

Out-Patients

THE place smelt faintly of ether and disinfectants and that vague mixture of clean odours common to hospitals.

A policeman, mopping his brow, stood in a passage holding his helmet by the chin strap. He had just appeared with the limp form of a girl over his arm. Outside rooms waited several sad people: a woman who had fallen down in the traffic, an old man who had hurt his hand in the door of a railway carriage, and a girl who had fainted in the street.

I looked through a door into a snow-white room where a man in a white overall was deftly bandaging the head of a woman, snipping lint, twisting the bandage with practised fingers, now and then speaking reassuringly to his patient. Near him a pretty girl with auburn hair, far from one's idea of a woman doctor, was bathing a hurt arm, her hands moving expertly among many bottles which stood beside her on a glass shelf. There was a sudden commotion. A noise far down the passage. Two policemen entered carrying a man! Knocked down by a taxicab! He was hurried into a vacant room, a doctor rushed up, the door closed. . . .

Here is a new aspect of London: London the

The Spell of London

blind beast that tramples on her children, London the heartless piece of machinery that catches humanity in its wheels, mangles it, and passes on. Every day it happens, every day policemen come in holding a helpless girl or an old man, every day the rush and roar of London means for someone a calm doctor in a white overall snipping lint, murmuring, "Don't tremble, don't worry; you're all right. You've had a marvellous escape!"



I went into a long, tiled room with a floor like the deck of a battleship, scrubbed till the wood looked like grey linoleum, and in this room were nearly a hundred men and women sitting in pews as if waiting for a church service to begin.

This was the out-patients' department, the most dramatic spot in a hospital. Here the man or the woman waits to learn whether that queer ache in the back means a temporary break with life, a white bed, and an operating theatre, or—blessed words—"nothing to worry about." A bell rings! A pale little woman looks round to see if the time has really come, swallows hard, rises, and passes through a door to learn her fate.

I fear to enter a hospital because I hate to see suffering. It is cowardly, it is wrong; and it is something we should fight against. But once inside I hate to go away. Here is courage, here is humour, here, I believe, is true beauty: the beauty of the human spirit putting out its loveliest flowers.

Out-Patients

Where is ugliness : in a beaten body ? Yes. But have you seen the eyes of sufferers ? Something shines there. In a hospital which you might believe would break your faith in life and bring you to regard human beings as organisms in various stages of decay, you instinctively feel the soul of man.

Say what you like about the medical profession and its shortcomings, a doctor's is the most noble calling a man can follow. He may be incompetent, he may be helpless, but he is never out when suffering knocks at the door. . . .

I slipped into a seat beside the out-patients. Quiet middle-class folk most of them. Some stolid, some waiting their turn with trembling fingers, some ignorant and terrified, like poor animals cornered, not knowing what is to happen to them, and just quietly waiting. Humour ? Oh, yes ! There is always a little worm of laughter gnawing a sore heart :

" My sister 'ad the same pain as you've got," I heard the inevitable Job's comforter remark with a sniff. " And she, pore thing, just faded away, she did. Worn down to a point, she was."

The other woman looked towards the speaker with eyes in which fear and dislike seemed about equal.

" P'raps my case won't be so bad, let's hope."

" I expect it's the same," replied the intolerable Mrs. Job. " Low down on the left side like a knife jabbing. That's it."

" It isn't my side ; it's my leg."

The Spell of London

"Oh, I beg pardon. I thought you said habdomen."

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In a small room a specialist who charges rich people big fees for his brains, was giving his services to the poor. The patient, unclothed, stood before him. Medical students stood around following his diagnosis, taking notes, and greedily gathering his whispers.

His uncanny, sympathetic hands moved over the body searching, searching, his fingers feeling the flesh, as if drawn by the magnet of disease. I looked at him bent over the naked, living body, listening to the heart, swift, keen, concentrated: a symbol of that enviable happy warrior who fights in a splendid cause. . . .

When in the frenzy of war a man saves the life of a comrade his country pays him the high tribute to courage. Here in London these V.C.'s of the X-ray and the lancet and the test tube, often unknown to science or fame, and often careless of reward, go over the top every day of their lives to rescue a fellow-man from the death that creeps towards him.

On the way out the little woman in black came from her ordeal, ah, so changed. She went out into the surge of London, an empty shopping basket over her arm, and there was something about her that made me think of a caged bird, released, going up into the freedom and the beauty of the sky.

Dog and Cat ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

THE narrow lane, lined with eating-houses, storerooms, and offices, possesses a cat colony which for sheer variety is unsurpassed—probably unequalled—by any other street of the same size in London.

It has long been my ambition to catalogue them, to probe with the zeal of a Rouge Dragon Pursuivant into delicate questions of ancestry and intermarriage ; but this I shall never do, having only one fully-occupied life. The colony is almost incredibly complicated, so that only the cats'-meat man, who dawns like a good deed in a noisy world each morning, can have any intimate knowledge of it. Strange, attractive females appear from time to time, licking their lips at their little hour of life, causing no doubt a flutter of excitement, of scandal, all of which passing, life resumes its normal calm. Now and then I notice suspicious importations in dirty shades of ginger (always an outcast colour) slinking past under the unwinking eyes of the established natives. Some of these visitants take root, some depart. All the time dynasties rise and dynasties fall in the refreshing shade of the fried fish shop ; and no one knows.

* * * *

There was a crowd in the lane yesterday. All

The Spell of London

kinds of people joined it. The carters and the men who unload things from lorries remained loyal till human flesh and blood could stand it no longer, for a Londoner may be able to resist wine, women, and song, but he can never resist a crowd. When I arrived it looked like a first-class street accident, or a spectacular dive from a top-floor window. I expected to hear them all press nearer crying, "Give him air!"

In the centre of the ring was a space, and in the centre of the space was the smallest cat on earth, the youngest inhabitant of the lane! He was black, and his eyes, not long open on the world, had that milky blueness of extreme infancy. He was ruffled, and, generally speaking, he looked as innocent as a reporter just down from Oxford.

Facing him, with his head on one side, looking as though he had just apologized and couldn't add anything, was a big, experienced fox terrier. He was the first dog this kitten had ever encountered, and he was much worse than anything it could have imagined. This small cat thought that he had stepped right out of the cradle into the grave!



The crowd were delighted; the crowd smiled.

They saw, without realizing, probably twenty or thirty thousand years assert themselves with unerring rapidity in this just-born cat: it turned itself into a small black pot-hook and faced the dog. "Now open your mouth and spit, and get

Dog and Cat

your claws ready, darling!" said millions of dead-and-gone cats in his ear. And this he did with great success, except for the fact that no sound came from his small pink mouth.

A marvellous tiny ball of instinct! Just imagine how a human baby would walk down the throat of the first lion it met. How have we managed to survive?

The dog blinked his eyes and looked away as if he had seen something very regrettable. After all it was only a cat! He looked again! The youngest inhabitant, who was rapidly packing the education of years into minutes, sensed that this hereditary enemy was thinking along the wrong lines, and he actually took a step forward and opened his mouth.

"Ha, ha!" said the crowd.

"Poor little thing!" said the girls.

"Leave it alone," said the man. "It knows its way about all right!"

And before this small spiteful thing the big dog backed with a "sorry-I-intruded" expression. It was a great victory for heredity!

Behind this scene I seemed to see thousands of years full of cats being chased up trees by dogs, thousands of dogs being scratched by cats, piling up the race memory, perfecting the technique of resistance, establishing an ancient law of prudence.

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The dog walked down the lane with a casual air—a masculine air of not having been mixed

The Spell of London

up with anything connected with cats ! The cat withdrew to normal proportions, and slunk off with a feminine air of having sent some man about his business.

The crowd scattered.

The work of the world was resumed.

Sixty Old Men ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

HE rises every morning with military precision, boils his shaving water and shaves. He is eighty-two. Most of those he once knew are dead.

On the shelf in his little room are books: a Bible, "The Horse in Fact and Fiction," "Cavalry Tactics," "India as I Knew It" (by Lieut.-Colonel Cuthbert Blunderbus, V.C., C.M.G.), "Religio Medici" (how did that get there?), and an Army List for the year 1885. Near his books is a rack containing six blackened pipes and a tin of navy cut.

The old man opens the door and finds on the step a loaf of bread, sugar, and tea, and he potters round his room, perhaps toasting a slice of bread or watching the kettle, moving slowly about his solitary breakfast. On the mantelpiece a woman of thirty looks from a picture frame as if she would like to say "Poor darling, let me help," and her eyes, it seems, follow him round and watch his old fingers fumble with canister lids and spill the thin trickle of sugar from the bag. He does not see her. His rheumatism is worse to-day. . . .

* * * *

He dresses carefully, puts on a gloomy black cloak that hangs behind his door, and a gloomy

The Spell of London

black hat to match, and walks out through grey cloisters to chapel, where Christ crucified hangs in the shadows over the altar.

He returns to his little room, ties his tie more carefully, puts on a felt hat at a distinct angle, takes an umbrella under his arm, and fixes a gold-rimmed monocle in his eye. When he moves you notice the breed of him, the good lines of him, the thin flanks, the spindle legs, the spare, whipcord old body, the way he puts his feet, the set of his shoulders, the manner in which his worn clothes sit on him.

With a clubman's nod to the porter at the gate he passes out under the arch of Charterhouse, hat cocked, monocle set, shoulders squared.

* * * *

There are sixty of them; sixty old Colonel Newcomes, who have fallen on evil days, "gentlemen by descent and in poverty" runs the old rule, "soldiers who have borne arms by land or sea, merchants decayed by pirates or shipwreck, or servants in household to the King or Queen's Majesty." The Charterhouse—a good deed that took root in London three hundred and fourteen years ago—gives them a pound a week, a black cloak, a black hat, rooms and food in hall. All that it demands is that they attend chapel once a day.

* * * *

Seven long white tables stand in an oak-panelled

Sixty Old Men

room, a rich, ancient hall; and into this room troop the sixty old men who have known better days. Sixty old men with the ghost of old authority over them, dead fires in their eyes, in their hearts what? Pride, I think, and a tradition.

See how they sort themselves out. Is it imagination, or has old age stiffened their natural prejudices a little? Do some hold themselves aloof, clinging with the tenacity of age to a relic of superiority? Those two childish old men who shout into one another's ears and from time to time glare round the table! They are always together. They were at the same public school.

After luncheon they drift off slowly by ones and twos. Some go out, no one knows where. A few sign the book in the dining hall, notifying that they will be out till midnight: such a spidery announcement of a night out! One of them, who is over ninety, rests most of the day, so that he may be strong enough to go down to his club at night, the club he has always known.

Most of them, however, just sleep or read, or they walk, leaning on two sticks, beside the green grass in the quadrangles, or through cloisters and under grey Tudor archways into quiet, cobbled courts where there is a lovely richness of Elizabethan brick faintly tinged with red, a wine-dark creeper over old stone, and an air of peace. The ancient quiet of the old monastery still surrounds these Carthusian monks. A beautiful ante-room to paradise. . . .



The Spell of London

At eight o'clock the curfew sounds over Smithfield from the bell tower of Charterhouse.

Sixty times the bell rings, each note a human life, once for every old man in Charterhouse. Once it rang nearly seventy times, and the ancient brethren rose up out of their chairs in alarm, cast aside their pipes, and peered out from their windows anxiously, wondering what disaster had followed them even into harbour. Seventy! That would mean a curtailment of privileges! Sixty furious old men were only soothed when it became known that the bell-ringer had a bad cold and, sneezing violently between his pulls, had lost all count of the curfew!

That does not often happen. The curfew of Charterhouse keeps faithful count of its sixty brothers, and in their little cells they listen, knowing that some night it will ring only fifty-nine. . . .

One by one the lights go out. Stray fingers of moonlight touch veined hands lying outside coverlets, fall over grey lined faces, find that place on mantelpieces where a woman in a picture frame looks out into the darkness with eyes which seem to say: "Poor darling, if only I could help!"

The Last Tube o o o o o

THROUGH the black O of the tunnel swings the golden chain of the last tube. Above ground London is silent. The monster is wrapped in sleep, but Piccadilly clings to consciousness as if unwilling to risk a nightmare. A slow taxicab skims the kerb, a policeman shakes a shop door, men with water-hoses stand shooting a young Niagara over the tired road. . . . A new day has just been born. Another twenty-four hours of possibility, of time, in eight million lives for good or bad. . . .

Down in the tube station, where the last train swings in with a protest of brakes, there is nothing to indicate the hour, yet it is vividly obvious. A big brown rat, unseen by most of the waiting passengers, has just gone like a flash from the porters' room to its usual hiding-place beneath a seat, on which so innocently sits a girl. If she knew . . . if . . . ! A big, lollopy rat so near those sandy legs !

A pale kind of thrill goes round the waiting crowd as the train comes to a standstill. They are like people who have lost all interest in life. They are dull, tired, listless. The men seem to be smoking pipes or cigarettes just to keep awake. The girl with the sandy legs has thrown off all coquetry—she is just herself, a poor, tired little scrap of humanity.

The Spell of London

"Move along there, please!"

That "please" after midnight strikes me as a pretty good tribute to our polite Virgils of the underworld.

In the amber warmth of the carriage the night-birds blink and revive.

What a puzzle the man opposite will be till the end of time! We survey each other with that faint distrust born of this unnatural hour. What are we? What business or pleasure kept us at the heart of London when all good people should have been a-bed? We gaze at each other like stuffed owls. When we have done that we read a stale newspaper.

There are solid, reliable-looking men with black bags: printers, telegraph men, or otherwise members of that army which works by night. There are two young men in evening dress, each different—the one an elegant young rake, the other dolled up for an occasion in evening clothes not often aired in public. At Charing Cross in steps a musician and a young fellow who looks as though the upper half of him was dressed at 8 a.m., and the lower half at 8 p.m. He wears patent leather shoes and dress trousers, with a lounge coat. He carries a brown paper parcel. He is a waiter. What do waiters carry home in the small hours? Fragments of the feast? Tips?

A huge negro enters. What is he? A prize-fighter? A leader of a crook gang? No, madam,

The Last Tube

he is the picturesque person in the baggy red and gold costume who at dinner made your Turkish coffee and shook rose-water on your hands.

In a corner a regrettably elderly man dozes in the untidy manner of one assisted to this by the grape.

Some go out, some come in.

A girl is standing. The dozy man awakens, and, with the air of Walter Raleigh laying down his cloak in the mud, rises heavily, extends his hand in what would have been a graceful gesture had it not carried away the hat of a little man sitting next to him, who glares with the fury of a lifelong abstainer forced to inhabit a world full of Bacchic satyrs.

"Madam!" begins the inflated man impressively, thinking of something beautiful to add, something poetic and flowery that fills his soul, but finds no doorway through speech; then, baffled, he sways twice, licks his lips, and ends lamely: "Sit down!"

* * * *

She sits. He stands, holding a strap and gazing as if from the top of Mount Everest—from the crest of his inflated imagination—at his fellow-passengers. Then, as if suddenly stricken with a great truth, he says in a loud voice to everybody: "Isn't it per-perfectly remarkable?" He pauses, and everybody listens. What is perfectly remarkable? He stands arrested in his portentous atti-

The Spell of London

tude, one admonishing finger outheld. Then, dropping his voice to a stage whisper, he says :

"We're all . . . going . . . home !"

His great truth appeals to every one. The pale, tired girl who has forgotten to be coy smiles, the solemn men in black coats smile, and, encouraged, the man goes on :

"Home," he says heavily, with a hint of tears in his voice, "the sweetest word in the English language. . . ."

The train stops, and the lecturer sits down promptly in the lap of the man opposite, and is ejected.

"And why," he goes on, "are we going home ? Why ?"

He turns to the little teetotal-looking man, whose hat he does not know he knocked off at the start of his performance.

"Why are you going home, sir ?" he asks politely.

The little man stiffens, and looks dead ahead.



"My friend here," explains the straphanger to the entire compartment, "is going home—the sweetest word in the English language—because there was nothing left in the decanter and they turned him out into the cold street. Isn't that awful ? Isn't that a tragedy ?"

"Camden Town !" shouts the conductor, wondering why every one is smiling.

"Good night," says the lecturer, raising his hat.

The Last Tube

We see him raising his hat to the conductor (and to anybody else who is looking), and so we leave him in an attitude of polite regret on the empty platform of Camden Town. . . .

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The last tube rushes on beneath sleeping London and out into the open, where the pale light of a new day will soon creep up into the sky.

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